

## Union College Union | Digital Works

---

Honors Theses

Student Work

---

6-2014

# Why Am I Buying Another Black Dress?: An Anthropological Perspective into the World of Fashion

Ava Carnevale

*Union College - Schenectady, NY*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalworks.union.edu/theses>



Part of the [Fashion Design Commons](#), and the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Carnevale, Ava, "Why Am I Buying Another Black Dress?: An Anthropological Perspective into the World of Fashion" (2014). *Honors Theses*. 492.

<https://digitalworks.union.edu/theses/492>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at Union | Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Union | Digital Works. For more information, please contact [digitalworks@union.edu](mailto:digitalworks@union.edu).

Why Am I Buying Another Black Dress?:  
An Anthropological Look into the World of Fashion

By

Ava L. Carnevale

\*\*\*\*\*

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
Honors in the Department of Anthropology

UNION COLLEGE

June 2014

## ***Abstract***

Carnevale, Ava. Why Am I Buying Another Black Dress?: *An Anthropological Look into the World of Fashion*. Department of Anthropology, June, 2014.

This thesis explores how the world of fashion permeates all facets of human life, including social success, individual identity and self-acceptance. The fashion decisions we make each day are, indeed, personal decisions that we use to express ourselves and convey our story to society, however the cultures, people, and society that surround us are what intrinsically make these choices for us. Through extensive research in New York City and at Union College, evidence proves that persons are influenced by their surroundings, including media and friend groups, which ultimately establish his or her wardrobes and his or her level of social freedom or social pressure.

I focus on two specific cultures, that of New York City and of Union College. I explored the type of people attracted to each area, observed what they were wearing and how they got this information for three months each, and then generated conclusions based on my findings. At Union College, the social atmosphere and friend groups persuade young women to wear items that are within the 'acceptable fashion scope' for that season. The demographic that applies to, and is admitted to, Union College is a narrow one, generating an almost-equal range of identities among young its undergraduate students. In New York City, on the other hand, inhabitants are from a diverse range of places, creating a melting pot. This variety creates a sense of social freedom and individuality, wear style is more creative, and different, diverse trends are acceptable.

This idea of social pressure, at Union College, and social freedom, in New York City, demonstrates how the culture that a women is submersed in plays a vital role on what items go in

to, and come out of, her closet. It is no secret that fashion, clothes, and style is a vital part of day to day life, so much that people may tend to forego its importance and inherently purchase things without realizing *why* they feel obliged to do so. It is this work that uncovers the reasons behind these decisions, starting from the creation and design of an article of clothing to how they come to fruition as a ‘trend.’ Although there are many steps between the first moment and the last of this process, the buyer is persuaded to purchase new items each season in order to keep up with the trends. These trends are the designers way of perpetuating new items and ultimately forcing the consumer to continue buying, creating the knowledgeable fact that women have “seven black dresses” hanging in their closets, one for each occasion and each trend that has become popular over the years.

## *Table of Contents*

<b>Title Page</b> .....	i
<b>Abstract</b> .....	ii
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	iv-v
<b>Introduction</b> .....	6
Why Do I Have a Passion for Fashion? .....	9
An Outline of the Thesis Chapters .....	12
<b>Chapter 1: Literature Review</b> .....	16
Fashion Cycles and Theories .....	20
Politics of Fashion – The Cultural Industry .....	30
The Fashion Business .....	32
Production and Consumption .....	37
Conclusion .....	39
<b>Chapter 2: A Word from the Experts</b> .....	41
Stephanie – “The Designer” .....	43
Daniel Musto – “The Stylist” .....	51
Olivia Holt – “The Celebrity” .....	54
Karina – “The Writer/Editor” .....	56
Conclusion .....	61
<b>Chapter 3: New York City: A <i>Melting Pot of Fashion Personalities</i></b> .....	65
New York City Fashion Week 2014 .....	78
Conclusion .....	85

<b>Chapter 4. Union College: Uniformity &amp; the Liberal Arts Expectation of Fashion . . . . .</b>	<b>88</b>
84 Maplecrest . . . . .	92
Ethnographic Survey Data – Union College Females . . . . .	95
Conclusion . . . . .	106
<b>Conclusion . . . . .</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>References . . . . .</b>	<b>116</b>

The world is made up of complex networks, economic systems, multifaceted cultural beliefs and traditions, and individual minds that function and think through linkages of neuron connections. One of the very few structures that unifies all human beings and separates us from all other organisms is the concept of fashion. Each day, every human being in the world makes a conscious decision as to how he or she should cloak his or her unique, naked figure from the rest of society. There are many factors that contribute to this decision – demographics, class, geographic location and weather patterns, profession, age, gender, and much more. This thesis works to create an answer as to why we as a species spend a mammoth amount of time and money deciphering and debating on this issue.

Through the actions and impacts of the fashion industry, clothes are thrust upon each society in different ways, causing people to feel the need to buy clothes for certain reasons – whether it be a sport, a job, a party, a wedding, exercising, dress codes at schools, or to ‘fit in’ with the current trend. Regardless of the reason, consumers believe in this process and this social norm of waking up each day and getting dressed. The choices they make function as an integral part of human symbolism, creating identity of the self. Not only are people represented through their choice in clothes, but they also choose a way to express their personal identities to the world. As I explain the different purposes, meanings and reasons of the fashion world and how its affected by these different variables and factors, an obvious question is formed– who decides what is a ‘trend’? Who picks and chooses what elements go together and when they are ‘in-style’ and how do they circulate and repeat themselves?

The ultimate goal of my research is to discover who has the ability to dictate what clothes end up in my closet; how do ‘trends’ start from an idea on paper, maneuver themselves onto a runway, make the front page and spread of a magazine, and convince consumers that they need

to be purchased. By conducting fieldwork, creating an ethnographic account of my personal experiences in the fashion industry, and ultimately cultivating observations and thoughts, I have come to better understand how all of these factors play into the world of fashion. I have realized why there are seven black dresses hanging in my closet, which only distinguish themselves from one another by a few minute details, hem lengths, or style adjustments.

The purpose of this research is to explain how cycles and tiers of fashion realize the patterns that the trends can follow and, ultimately, shed some light upon how and why consumers are convinced to purchase specific clothing. Many factors play into the *why* question, such as demographics, what places he or she has been exposed to, and how he or she acquires fashion information. This work strives to make observations based on fieldwork, interviews, and ethnographic research done in places like Union College in Schenectady, NY and New York City in order to compare and contrast the ways in which we are sheltered from the world of fashion or completely smothered by it. I use other literature and previous observations to create conclusions regarding the consumer and how fashion blogs, media, designers and celebrities influence him or her.

By discussing my experiences in New York City, I demonstrate how this particular culture and location is in direct correlation with mainstream, high-end, designer, “catwalk,” runway fashion. I explain how the designers, stylists, and journalist work together in order to function as a well-oiled machine that allows a trend, or style, to be successful. The trends that begin at the top tier (possibly higher than New York City—in Paris or Milan) tend to filter their way down to lower tiers and eventually are changed enough so they become affordable to the general population. I have concluded that this mimicking of fashion trends from celebrity, (or



model on the catwalk), to common store-goer creates a link, or bond, between the two, allowing the average person to gain social status among their surrounding peers or social group.

Union College in Schenectady, NY provides an exception to the mainstream fashion world that we see in New York City (we can call this a subculture). The Union College campus environment creates a secluded world of fashion made up of different high-end brands that gain the interest of Liberal Arts students at other colleges and universities as well for specific reasons. I have discovered that a campus like that of Union College provides peer pressure, opportunity, and expectation for students to wear expensive clothes and specific looks that fall within the acceptable fashion parameters of the college community. Through ethnographic observation, fieldwork and data collection, I have found specific trends that make Union College the exception from the commonly known fashion world.

In both case studies, it can be observed that fashion is used as a way to convey a person's identity to the world. Since clothes cover the naked flesh, they are the only things differentiating people from one another at first impression. This seems extremely simple; yet it is important to remember that a person dresses in a certain way in order to convey a message of identity to the world, not necessarily express one's actual identity or intention. If a person is really a rock 'n roll fanatic, they can still dress in their prep school clothes and attend classes in order to convey the Catholic School identity to his or her peers. Places like New York City offer a simplified environment with less ground rules when it comes to creating, or conveying, an identity. The expectations and stereotypes of Union College hinder a person's level of self-expression by creating social guidelines, social norms, or social fashion parameters.

Each culture in the world can be dissected, researched, and observed in order to find specific characteristics that are intricate and unique to that location. For this reason, this

anthropological study of the fashion industry works to explore only two specific locations in American culture in order to provide accurate and detailed examples and research on the topic. My ethnographic work can only speak from my perspective and the different experiences that I encountered. New York City and Union College are so immensely unique and different. They maintain patterns of fashion cycles consistent with each other, yet, in the end, produce different trends and brands.

### ***Why Do I Have a Passion for Fashion?***

My story for the love of fashion begins with my life as a competitive figure skater. For 18 years of my life, I was surrounded by different cuts of fabric, colors, materials, and gemstones. At such a young age, my mind was impressionable and I can remember getting so excited to drive to the dressmaker's house with my mom, ready to create, design, and eventually wear a new pretty dress. It would be a unique creation brought to fruition only to be worn by me, on the ice, to my music. I was young, excited, and overwhelmed by the concept of dress design.

Beginning at the age of seven, I would sit with my dress designer and play my skating music on repeat, for a grand total of probably ten thousand times, until we both contrived a masterpiece that best suited the rhythm, theme, and message of particular cut of music. Not until later in life did I realize that the style and cut of the dress had to compliment the shape of my young, athletic build. After we established some sort of color scheme, mixed with fabric textures and skirt cuts on paper, it was time for him to bring our visions to reality. He would lay out the fabrics of the same color we had chosen on the original sketch, and I could pick which ones I liked the most—obviously based on the texture, which directions the fabric stretched and whether or not he had enough fabric in the same exact shade and hue. He had endless supplies of lycra and mesh, lace and velvet... It was so overwhelming. A few weeks later, I would return

for a fitting to try on the dress and every time, I felt like a princess. I knew that this dress was created from a blank piece of paper, and it became mine – which made it so special and I wanted to show it off to the world.

It was the little things that made fashion so consuming and hypnotizing. Wearing bright red lipstick at the age of seven, wearing a matching warm-up suit that had rhinestones that complimented those on the pleated skirt of my dress were all highlights of my young life. As I grew older, the length of my program got longer, the cut of music went from something fun like the theme song of *Charlie Bown* or *Beetlejuice* to a more classic melody, and my dresses became more competitive. I noticed a change—I did not have such a say anymore in the design of my dress. I think my mother's heart broke when I told her that my new dress was not very “me” anymore. Eventually, I came to know, and understand, that my dress had to compete with the others at the rink. More importantly, I knew that there were certain cuts, colors, and styles that were appropriate at the time and anything I wanted could not just be thrown onto a sketch board and into fruition – my dress was the deal breaker between the gold medal and the silver. My dresses had to be accepted in the fashion world of figure skating. It was through subtle realizations like this that I became conscious of fashion and began to wonder why people decided to wear what they were. Regardless of what I *wanted* to wear, I *had* to wear a particular dress in order to fit in, (with the trend), and look the best in the group.

From this point, I started to settle for sketching the dresses I wish I could wear, on a private notepad, and at the same time wearing the ones that were “socially” figure skating acceptable. I wanted the judges to like me, and more importantly, I wanted to win. I had to play the game and wear what everyone else was in order to be accepted. My personal skating dress sketches became clothes sketches, and those clothes sketches turned into Fall Season, Winter

Preseason, and “Bikini Ready” fashion lines. When I got my license, my passion for drawing dwindled and my enthusiasm for shopping and discovering went up. I loved exploring the streets of Boston, finding vintage boutiques, thrift shops, and department stores to see what treasures I could stumble upon. Sometimes I would land upon an old flannel shirt covered in patches dating back to 1958 or I would find designer pumps marked down 75% because the person selling them had no clue what, or who, Manolo Blahnik was – I began to call these lucky finds, “scores.” I self-educated myself on fashion, what it was and how the seasons and cycles worked. But I began to ponder the questions, “Why?” and “How?”

By the time I was a senior in high school, I could walk down the corridors of my hallway and take detailed mental notes as to which people were wearing which season’s clothes. I could tell where people bought their jeans just by the pockets, cut, and the consistency of the denim. The moment I noticed that fashion would be a big part of my life was when I bought *People StyleWatch* and could recognize the names of the designers they were mentioning, pronounce them, and then spot which celebrity was wearing which brand. It transitioned from hobby to passion very quickly, especially as I entered college, and I began to wonder about the “Why?” and “How?” questions I posed earlier. I wanted to understand why people would change their entire wardrobe upon entering college their freshman year. More importantly, why are these trends even in style? – UGG boots? Tight denim jeans with one or two rips? Barbour Jackets with plaid on the collar? When I set foot on my college campus, I thought I entered the Twilight Zone. Everyone looked the same, talked the same, and acted the same. How did these companies convince people to do this, or who else was behind it?

Another question I asked myself was why do I want to buy another black dress? I have sixteen in my closet – okay seven – so why do I need another one? A possible solution crossed

my mind; well I have one for a formal event, one for a party, one for dinner, one for an interview, etc. It was justified; I had a black dress for every day of the week, just in case I need a black dress each night of the week. I could not believe that I convinced myself that I had contrived an excuse for the rationality of buying and owning seven, almost identical, black dresses. With that, I recognized that I was subliminally convinced to buy these dresses by the media, the celebrities, and purely the fact that it was on sale. Was this essential good (clothes and fashion) controlling our lives and defining our identities culturally and independently?

### ***An Outline of the Thesis Chapters***

Chapter one is made up of my literature review, which works to combine the concepts and principles of thinkers that came before me, and the facts and observations they discovered about the world of fashion. Although I found a plethora of knowledge on the topic of fashion, thinkers in other disciplines, mostly sociology, conceived these ideas. Anthropological work is usually done in places outside of the United States, and the topic of fashion is also studied in places like Europe or Asia. Rarely is the topic of fashion in the United States regarded as an anthropological field.

With this knowledge, my literature review discusses the background and history of fashion, as well as different theories contrived by philosophical and sociological thinkers. I discuss the “life cycle” of a trend and how that particular trend flows up and down different tiers. These life cycles are also known as patterns, which perpetuate and ultimately return after an unknown period of time – thus proving that fashion repeats itself. I address the importance of acknowledging demographics, education, and all other social factors that come into play regarding the choice of wardrobe and the person’s ability to obtain it. The research in my literature adequately explains the big picture, the storyline of fashion and the trends that come in

and out of each season. However, I believe that there are holes in the story and places where questions were not followed by sufficient answers.

The topics that my literature review fails to mention and argue, my research does – the question of why?—Why are consumers convinced to buy new clothes every season, and how are the marketing teams and designers changing the trends just enough with the inauguration of new collections in order to do this? The authors from my literature review also forget to explain a major topic: How the consumers are influenced in the first place to buy clothes and how does this influence determine which clothes they choose to buy. Throughout the course of a person's life, they are met with different influences, friend groups, and demographic areas that ultimately oppress their fashion creativity or allow it to thrive.

The rest of my work is broken down into subsections, or case studies. These are personal accounts or specific examples that will defend my thesis and explain how the industry functions as a way to persuade buyers into thinking they need to buy more clothes because they are outdated. Fear of rejection by social groups or being out of style plays a crucial role in the fashion industry and perpetuates constant purchases. Social acceptance and status while conveying one's chosen identity is a central concept that immortalizes the need for fashion cycles and the production of new clothes. Throughout my work, I will explain two different fashion subcultures, and how they create their own world of fashion while maintaining and executing the fundamental steps required to create a successful trend. The victorious trends that come to fruition may be different from culture to culture, but it is important to recognize how they got there and why consumers are convinced to buy them.

Chapter two dissects the interviews I had with different elite members of the fashion industry. I conducted ethnographic interviews with two magazine/blog editors, one designer,

and one stylist. I use this chapter to explain the difference in the roles of people in the fashion industry and how they work together as a team in order to create, uphold, and conserve the fashion industry and the cycles of trends. I also find this chapter to be extremely useful in understanding the fashion world, as they are very much so involved in it, trained on the subject and faced with problems in it each and every day. Their knowledge and extensive descriptions and insight on the fashion world are extremely credible and offer support and evidence to my research.

Chapter three serves as an ethnographic account of my summer (2013) spent in New York City working as a Fashion Intern for an online celebrity gossip and news blog. In this chapter, I describe experiences, instances, and circumstances in which the fashion world offered joy, challenges, and answers to my overall questions regarding the fashion industry and why consumers continued to buy clothes. I call upon my experiences, interviews, internship tasks, and connections that I created while living in Manhattan, as well as observations and interviews conducted and explained in chapter two. This chapter delves deeper into the mainstream, high-end catwalk side of fashion that can also be seen in Milan and Paris, ultimately establishing a setting of the industry in order to conceive a norm and a reference point of the trade. I explain occurrences from my job tasks as a fashion intern to the experience I had while attending New York Fashion Week. The small island of Manhattan creates a different environment, a melting pot, where people are widely accepted for and sort of identity they convey to the public eye through the art of fashion.

Chapter four works to identify how and why Union College's fashion and trends function as an exception to what we find to be the norm (in New York City). Through observation, research, and ethnographic interviews and surveys, I am able to present conclusions regarding

how Union is a subversive example of the common fashion culture. The campus community is pressured by expectations from administration, alumni, trustees, parents paying a lot of money, and above all, the students themselves, to appear a certain way. Surprisingly, this pressure to conform is mostly expressed through their wardrobe choice. Through observations of Union College, we can speculate and conclude that similar pressures rest upon the shoulders of other Liberal Arts students, and ultimately on the clothing choices of all undergraduates of these private institutions.

These two fashion cultures, New York City and Union College, serve as very different subcultures to conduct fieldwork and allow us to analyze the similarities and differences between the two. From that, I explain why people wear what they do, how they are influenced based upon their demographic location, and how the fashion world is made up of an intricate set of steps and parts, operated by key players that function in unison for the same ultimate goal, success of a trend. It is important to appreciate each culture for its own customs and values, yet it is so intriguing to see where their traditions and patterns cross and diverge.

My personal experiences and overall passion for clothes have generated a great deal of observations and connections that led to the creation of this work. My ethnographic research offers a different perspective to the extensive examples and firsthand accounts that have already been produced and seen as the most useful explanations of the fashion industry. My goal is to use this previous knowledge, completed by anthropologists and sociologists, on top of my personal interviews and research in order to discover the link between the creator and the consumer, thus arguing that there are influences amid the alpha and omega that ultimately reinforce this perpetuating cycle.



## ***Chapter 1. Literature Review***

The human body is a universal canvas for self-expression. From culture to culture, we can witness creativity, individuality, ritual and social norms as seen through wardrobe and traditional clothing within a tribe, village or society. The necessary clothing used to cover the revealing flesh and human body parts has become a symbol and trademark representing the values and morals of a population. Throughout time, clothes, and the concept of fashion as a whole, have been studied and analyzed for their purpose and perpetuating cycle of fresh ideas and creativity. Through research, trend forecasting, trend roundups and designing, fashion has come to be viewed as an essential ritual within a society that dictates how people interact, function, and go about their daily lives.

These articles of woven thread hold a much higher value in society than appreciated at first observation—value denoting the Durkheimien social role and function of fashion, rather than its Marxist value for means of production plus labor. This value is individual to the person and usually inherent on the particular culture, creating a web of different options and a variety of styles and fashion trends over time. These trends, and the cycle in which they repeat themselves is precisely where the question of this paper derives. I plan to analyze the cycle and patterns of fashion style and from that, answer clearly how these styles perpetuate themselves into the market for continuous purchase by the consumers. With this information and a historical background and understanding of the world of fashion and its place within a society, I work to create answer the question that begs who *really* has the power to choose the current style? – Is it the designers that create the fashion ideas, push them into production and thus become the only option for consumers, or is it the consumers, who ultimately choose the product, wear it, and create the trend on the street?

The body has been “dressed” in a variety of ways since the beginning of time – through tattooing, jewelry, piercings and, of course, clothes. In her book, The Fashioned Body, Joanne Entwistle argues that a person can consider the history of fashion as a characteristic of the human body, not something separate. The human body is never a blank canvas when exposed in the “public arena” versus the possibility of this when alone in the “private sphere” such as a house or shower (Entwistle 2000: 7). Humans “embellish” the body with creativity as simple as body paint and cosmetics in order to adorn the flesh in a personal, or cultural, way (2000: 6). In this, we can reference tribes with symbolic face/body paint, or jewelry. These traditional articles or ways of assimilating to norms in a society allow the individual to feel accepted within a group in the social sphere (2000: 11). Thus, the act of wearing clothes bridges the gap between these two sectors of personal existence, private and public. However, Benstock and Ferriss seem to think that fashion is “perpetual innovation” (1994: 161), used to bridge a gap between the old and the new. So is fashion used as a political tool to move from one sector to another, whether private to public, or old to new? These theorists find fashion to be a bridge between two opposing, or different, divisions – giving them a much higher purpose than previously thought.

Entwistle goes on to site another source, Quentin Bell, who claims social pressures are reinforced through clothing. Bell says “our clothes are too much a part of us for most of us to be entirely indifferent to their condition: it is as though the fabric were indeed a natural extension of the body, or even the soul” (1976: 19, Entwistle 2000: 9). This reinforces Entwistle’s theory that suggests that clothes link humans between the individual self and the way the exterior world perceives that self. Merleau-Ponty would argue that this link reflects the art of getting dressed perfectly. He argues the concept of “perceptive awareness,” how we view the world through our own personal lens. This awareness gives light to his “phenomenology” of the experience of

dress in everyday life. This idea is that dress makes the “subjective act of attending to one’s body and making the body and object of consciousness and is also an act of attention with the body” (2000: 30). Here again, we see that the bridge between perception of the self and the way society perceives that self is born and supported, thus proving there is a strong link between the will of the individual and the will of society that ultimately hinders choice when it comes to dress and fashion.

It is explained, and underscored, in Entwistle’s work that the “conventions of dress attempt to transform flesh into something recognizable and meaningful to a culture” (2000: 8). However she argues the point that dress is not only suited to social norms, but it is the “outcome of social pressures” and “symbolic of the situation in which it is found” (2000: 15). The socialization of norms is different from culture to culture, however Marcel Mauss, an anthropologist, claims that the body is shaped by the techniques of the body. These techniques, he goes on to say, are gendered and ultimately cause men and women to use their bodies in extremely different ways (2000: 14). An example of this socialization would be how women need to learn how to sit in a skirt in public in order to be considered “proper” or “classy.” This is a socialized and learned norm, however it is not required by many men to learn this, as society and socialization would not normally call for it. This mentality can be seen in society through institutions like dress codes in private schools (2000: 21).

This notion of gender can play a large role regarding who buys what product in society and the consciousness of the self. According to Berger, women consider themselves objects of society when getting dressed, while men tend to not think about their apparel or wardrobe choice in that same way. This way of thinking causes women to make fashion choices, consciously or subconsciously, which, according to Tseëlon, ultimately exemplify how they believe they are

being portrayed (2000: 31). Societies' social and cultural pressures that influence a woman's thoughts regarding her fashion choices can explain these conscious practices.

Fashion, its emergence and constant changes can be explained not only through gender and social pressures, but also through hierarchy, social structure, and class. Having attracted the interest of writers from many different fields, there is clearly something cohesive about the culture of fashion and the way it affects a community (2000: 78). Through processes of social evolution in society, fashion, and its trends, follow a succinct pattern of organized conversion dictated by the choices made by the people who purchase the clothes and the designers that offer the products. Entwistle decides to delve further into the complexity involved in the link between these fashion changes and their creation. Her example of the changing hemlines and the shapes of corset bodices begin to explain the cycle of fashion design and how they evolve in a recurring cycle, ultimately orchestrated by class and social decisions in society (2000: 79).

According to research, the framework surrounding the concept of fashion has always been due to a change social stability. Entwistle claims that the emergence and development of fashion seems to be a social change: fashion emerges in societies which have some social mobility rather than a fixed and stable class structure" (2000: 82). As hemlines shortened and fabric fell closer to the body in the 1300s, the trend was mostly seen on those in the bourgeoisie or the upper class. Later, in the 1500's dress became more sexualized, featuring more embellishments and accessories, such as large hats and jewelry (2000: 85). As the newer trends became more popular, it became more difficult for the poorer members of society to keep up with the constant change of clothes and style, making them valued at a higher status and regarded as a symbol of wealth and power (2000: 87). The cosmopolitan trends were seen on members of the high Renaissance court and within those prestigious families. Since only the rich

could fully participate in high fashion, the ‘elites’ were created and the class division within Europe was accentuated.

In this time, the elites wore eccentric clothes to symbolize status; the clothes served as a way to differentiate between class and social status and as a method of acknowledging political achievement in the high courts (2000: 92). It was said that the bourgeoisie and those of higher class would be wearing “one’s wealth on one’s back” (Davis 1992: 58). This concentrated group of fashion forward individuals maintained the wealth, the control of the government, and the power in society. From this mentality and public ideology, the “trickle-down” theory was born. The “trickle-down” theory derives itself from the “process of emulation by which new fashions pass from the upper class to the lower” (1992: 59), it is the concept that fashion is “launched at the top of the social structure and eventually works it’s way down to the bottom” (1992: 110). The reference of the trends moving to a lower class aims to describe how the clothes, and fashion overall, becomes more ostentatious and ultimately changes its original appearance as it reaches all tiers of society. The lower classes may not be able to afford the original type of clothes seen on the Queen, for example, however, they could recreate something similar at a lower, more affordable cost.

### ***Fashion Cycles and Theories***

Theories of fashion have been studied and analyzed. We can see through Craik’s clear outline that fashion and different styles have worked as a form of communication and as a cultural practice or system (2009: 106). She discusses how fashion can be seen through the lens of different roles, the first being a symbol of essential human necessity, the second a chronology of human development, and the third as an organic process of civility (106). As noted in other

texts, for instance Entwistle's work and Davis' account of fashion as identity, the derivative of style trending and cyclical patterns begins with George Simmel's "trickle-down" theory.

The "trickle-down" theory, created by George Simmel, places a strong amount of pressure on the upper class, as they are in charge of beginning the trends and perpetuating them, and eventually, changing them. The cycle is perpetuated because as soon as the middle class receives a variation of the trends, initially created by the upper class, the upper class has already moved on to the next big style. With this perpetuating and constant flow of fashion, much attention is brought to the "class functions of fashion" (Davis 1992: 111). Simmel, in his essay, continues to discuss this topic. As soon as the lower classes get a hold of these top trends, the upper class (celebrities, wealthy, etc.) discard them and move on to something new, almost as if these fashions were "their ideas" and now they are poisoned (1992: 112). He references this cycle to be something like a game, as the upper class want to distinguish itself from the rest of society. Davis considers this to be an extremely narrow vision of fashion and claims the theory forgets to recognize fashion pluralism and polycentrism, topics of discussion that will arise later. Peter Braham, who is cited by Entwistle (2000: 220) in her work, supports the trickle-down theory. Braham says that "the code of modifications displayed on the catwalks [...] stand to be rejected, toned down, or embraced not only by a host of publicists, critics, journalists and fashion leaders, but also by garment manufacturers and store buyers" (Braham 1997: 134). Fashion choices are made at each stage of the process, something I will explain later, and largely support or deny this theory.

According to Davis, similarly to theories produced by Weber, when observing and discussing class groups, it is important to see how social status works to have a role in the fashion culture within a society. The 1920's Chanel creation of the "little black dress"

symbolized, not only a sophisticated young woman, but also a woman of high superiority and high status within a society. This simple, yet classy, look was later described as an “expensively poor” look or “deluxe poor.” When the Great Depression hit, it was clear that this naïve, modest look was perfect since black was the color of wealth and sophistication during this difficult time in history. Black can be seen as symbols of eroticism, respectability, elegance and luxury. It wasn’t until long after the upper class began to wear black that the lower tiers of society began to wear black in the daytime (Davis 1992: 63-64). The concept of status was portrayed by this little black dress because the goal for women of the time was to dress as “modestly as their maids” (1992: 65). By dressing the equally and humbly to she that serves you, status plays a much bigger role than class. Now the woman would look simple and sophisticated, yet she would be respected and honored for her humility- a clever way to portray one’s status, rather than class, in a time when class was everything.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women began to identify the color black as chic because it’s “glamorous and [...] it sells” (Craik 2009: 42-43). It is clear that black has been a constant safety net for women throughout the century and after the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We can see this in modern times in every magazine claiming, “Green is the new black” or “Camouflage is the new black.” All modern fashions, however, re related to black and its reputation for being the color to wear in any situation (2009: 43).

Craik ‘s analysis of fashion systems, or cycles, seems to be the most clear and precise. She claims that these cycles are made up of different elements, such as codified types of apparel, rules of wearing and combining pieces, economic and symbolic values, social meanings and statuses, and other codified modes of relating fashion to self identity (2009: 109). The most important topic of discussion that Craik brings up is the fact that fashion is part of a wider vision,

or system, that goes far beyond a person's individual social structure. However, Entwistle elaborates on this topic in her introduction, giving a better perception and depth to what individuality means in fashion. When women look in the mirror, it is a personal adventure to be accepted by themselves and by those surrounding them. Choosing wardrobes daily can be seen as a constant struggle of seeing oneself and being seen (Woodward 2007: *Chapter 5*). This creates two dimensions into the personal identity, created when a woman chooses her clothes when she gets dressed. This idea supports Craik's argument stating that a person's individual social structure, personally and those that surround her, influence fashion choices in certain situations.

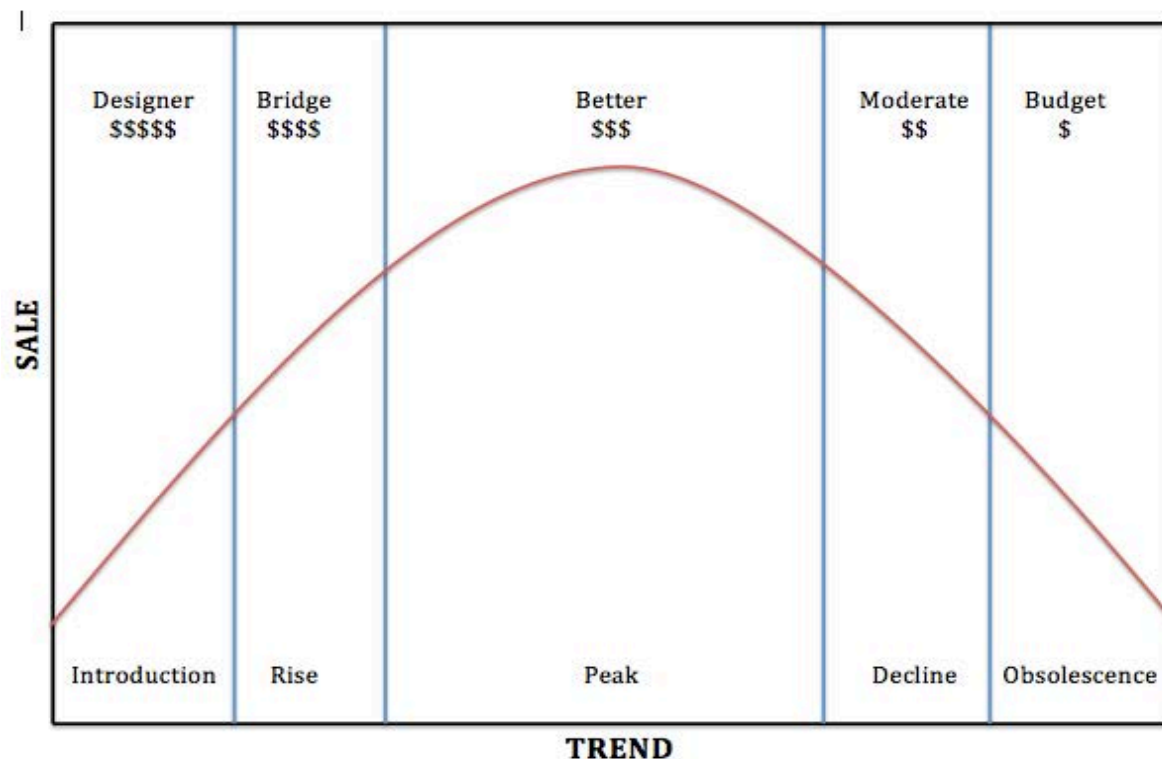
In modern day fashion, the controversy between overdressing and underdressing can be seen as a way of insinuating one's status (Davis 1992: 66). In high fashion in contemporary America, a man showing up to a very important event with stubble and messy hair is considered "sexy" or "hot," words to describe current trends that are "in" style. Another example would be when a man wears a tuxedo with Converse sneakers on the red carpet. Although this would be considered out of the norm, and possibly breaking a social fact of contemporary fashion, the look is considered different, and is being worn by someone with high status. This break in the norm strengthens his social status because he is not afraid to take risks and his casual apparel and appearance draw attention to his character, and thus his humility. Davis describes this action as "doing something wrong" [...] in an attempt to create preplanned errors in order to better his or her hierarchical status in society (1992: 66). These are symbolic institutions rooted into the language and reasoning of the fashion world to better appropriate society into high fashion sections and "trickle-down" tiers; Those that consciously make mistakes, and those that make the same fashion errors by accident.



As I have mentioned and referred to, fashion has been considered a pattern or a cycle due to the repeated trends and constant state of change. According to Davis,

“The *cycle* can be best defined as the phased elapsed time from the introduction of a fashion to its supplantation by a successive fashion. The *process* refers to the complex of influences, interactions, exchanges, adjustments, and accommodations among persons, organizations and institutions that animates the cycle from its inception to its demise” (Davis 1992: 106).

This being said, although the fashion *process* and the fashion *cycle* are both extremely different, they are very much related and intertwined in order to perpetuate the success of a particular fashion or trend. This can be seen below in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** This is a replica of a graph used to explain fashion trends.

The graph simplifies the lifetime of a particular season’s fashion. The red line represents the trend and its height represents the sale. As the style becomes popular on the catwalk and enters the fashion market, its sales are low because its price is so high—making it a desirable piece for the elites. However, once the trend peaks in its sale, it is at an affordable price for most of the

general population to purchase. As the trend dissipates and fades out, sales are at the bottommost part of the curve and the cost of the garment is at its lowest, available for sale at places like Wal-Mart or Kohl's.

Davis refers to Brenninkmeyer (1963) regarding the most commonly used metaphor that works to explain fashion cycles. The cyclical nature of the fashion world is compared to the waves in the sea. In this metaphor, she explains that “as one wave crests, and begins to dissipate, new waves form” which will then follow the same natural habit of cresting and dissipating. However, the waves themselves are all very different in relation to one another, some have higher speeds, force and amplitude causing them to take over other waves in different ways each time (1992: 104). In regards to women's fashion, although hemlines and “the color of the season” may change rapidly (may have a different amplitude or force), the overall structure of fashion and the silhouette of the woman remain constant like the repetitive motion of the waves.

I personally think this metaphor works perfectly with the cyclical rotation of fashion. Although each wave of trends is different from the previous, some more forceful than the previous, the overall mission and constant motion of the fashion cycle remains constant in focusing on the overall silhouette of the female bodice. This brings us to our next question, which asks how quickly do the waves dissipate or over take the next one, as in how quickly does one trend take over another and how long will each fashion statement last in a given society. Many scholars agree that this fashion cycle, or fashion flow, has not been broken or altered since the 1300s (Davis 1992: 105). The commercial Revolution of the 14<sup>th</sup> century brought many changes to patterns and discourse of fashion and clothing. These changes were the result of improvement of cultural values such as individualism and economic success (Rubinstein 1995: 31). The emergence of “fashion” in this time was said to be the court of Philip the Good, duke of

Burgundy in 1467. He “exploited the resources available in the territory he controlled to create new clothing styles” (1995: 146). Paris had previously been the center of high fashion and intricately embellished dress, however, in the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the courts in Burgundy trumped the courts in Paris in regards to fashion sense and innovation (1995: 146).

All the social and political changes that have occurred since the 14<sup>th</sup> century in the West have left something constant and unchanging about the need and use for fashion. The only recognizable change regarding fashion has been the force of the waves, or in other words, the amount of time it takes for trends to turn over into new fashions and ideas (Davis 1992: 105). After the World War two, freelance designers and seamstresses began making clothes for middle to upper class women. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was known to take decades for trends and certain fashion ideas to perpetuate, come to fruition, and eventually dissipate. In modern, contemporary fashion culture, fashions cycle in one or two seasons. Davis claims,

“Intensive capitalization and rationalization of the apparel industry, consumer affluence along with democratization and a loosening of class boundaries, and the greatly quickened flow of information via social media and technology progressively shortened the life cycle of a trend” (1992: 107).

Fashion as a business emerged around this same time with the emergence of the Industrial Revolution. This was due in large part to the “introduction of raw materials such as wool and cotton from colonial outposts” (Craik 2009: 208). Also, there was a creation of consumer culture along with innovative processes of mechanical mass production. As the work place became urbanized and developed, there was a need for constant production of clothing. This idea supports the trickle up theory, which will be explained shortly, since these machines divided classes by offering mass production clothing and desired, elite, intricate custom clothing (2009: 208). Over the past two centuries, designers and retailers have worked to maintain a constant equilibrium, between the mass-produced and the individually crafted vestment. A women

normally finds herself in a constant pattern of comparing ‘Is this me?’ and ‘Does this go?’ (Woodward 2007: *Chapter 1*). Many items are usually purchased through the mass-produced and the mass market, yet they are seen as unique to the individual once they enter her closet and absorb a more personal meaning with the connection to memories.

Another fashion writer, Hoschwender, has written on the same topic and agreed with this idea that discusses a recent increase in fashion cycles. However her ideology touches on one of the most important points in the fashion world – Fashion repeats itself, “the 60s have been revived since the 60s” many times (1992: 107). Davis finishes up this section discussing how modern day fashion is less symbolic than it has been in the past. Fashion is less powerful in regards to class and status and functions less as a social movement, but rather a social statement. Davis calls this “fashion pluralism,” as I mentioned earlier, explaining how fashion no longer has a threshold for domination of an entire group of people, but specific styles rather dominate in certain places, cultures, and age groups. Craik reinforces this theory as well with her concept of “trickle-up” theory, where “street” fashion becomes more important and affordable to all classes, elites and lower classes.

The concept of polycentrism also offers a critique to the “trickle-down” theory. *Polycentrism*, meaning having many centers of authority, relates to the idea of fashion through its relation to social class. Although trends and fashions are said to begin at the “top” of society and work their way down to the bottom, it is clear the polycentrism offers a rebuttal. There are many cultural, personal, and social factors that play into clothing choice. Personal opinion, demographic and social groups can create social norms through other forces of authority that will alter what people are wearing, regardless of social class. For example, a middle class girl that lives in a rural area with extremely strict parents would not be able to wear the same clothes as a

middle class girl living in a single parent home in Manhattan, NY. Friend groups, upbringing, and city or town can have a lot of influence on a person's style or ability to wear clothes that she or he desires.

Craik goes on to discuss the opposite of this theory, something the other authors forget to mention—the “trickle-up” theory. She argues that the “trickle-down” theory does not explain those fashions that are adopted by the elite and places too much importance on class or status, which is precisely what the “trickle-up” theory works to justify. This reversal explains those trends that are worn by the lower class and are implemented and embraced by elites (Craik 2009: 107). She states,

“reverses the trickle-down thesis and argues that more often, especially in recent decades, fashion impulses come from everyday, subcultural, or street influences and, once adopted by an influential set of fashion aspirants, get taken up by the fashion industry proper. While the street style embodied a badge of identity and difference, the designer version oriented around stylishness and now-ness” (2009: 107).

This theory can be seen when we see our modern day “elites,” like celebrities and musicians, walking around in normal street clothes that are affordable to the general public. For example, *Hollywoodlife.com*, an online celebrity gossip blog, features fashion columns such as “Shoesday Tuesday” and “Get the Look” that offer exact articles of clothing that celebrities were spotted in that week. What Craik does not explain is how the reason it becomes “fashion” or “trendy” is the fact that the elites wear it and make it their own. They are then spotted in the media, as through *Hollywoodlife.com*. The “trickle-up” theory can also be interpreted as fashions that are adopted by the elite from classes below them, reversing all previous theories on the symbolic meaning of fashion.

Another theory on the cycle of fashion is George Sproule's Six-Stage fashion Process, which integrates Sociological, Economic and Psychological factors (Craik 2009: 109). This

particular theory incorporates different variables that can lead to the success or demise of a particular fashion or trend, like development, commercialization, decline and replacement. These are all points that Simmel's trickle-down theory does not explain. Also cited by Davis (1992: 123-58), this theory breaks down the integration process through first, the invention of fashion through the economic market or social norms, such as cultural or traditionally accepted trends. The next step to analyze is the endorsement and adoption by elites and celebrities. It is important to recognize how and why these trends were accepted by the highest "tier" and implemented as a marker of "fashion." Next, he discusses the diffusion of the fashion through the fashion conscious—media or magazines. Fourth, one must take note of the take-up of the fashion by non-fashionable groups. By this, he is referring to those in tiers below the elites. It is important to recognize whether or not these fashions were mimicked exactly or to what level they were adopted. This leads to the next step, the transformation of fashion from novelty to a symbol. This creates experimentation and the compromise of the original trend. Lastly, you must analyze the removal of the existing style, thus initiating a similar, but new, phase of fashion (109).

I particularly feel as though Sproles' theorizing of fashion is informative because it elaborates on the "trickle-down" theory and emphasis the importance of asking, "Why?" His theory also works to question why a new trend would suddenly perpetuate from the previous. However, Sproles does not incorporate the concept of "trickle-up" – his theory relies mostly on class differentiation. He does bring up a new point regarding the concept of media and the diffusion of fashion through social outlets, thus informing the public of these trends. The stages endured by a particular fashion trend, or style, are critical to its success. "Choices are made by manufacturers, fashion buyers, and retail outlets regarding what to sell" (Entwistle 2000: 220).

In this statement, I believe that Entwistle challenges the previous theories because she brings in another variable, the individuals that work to promote and choose the trend in those media outlets that Sproles mentions. Clearly, the theories of fashion each seem to a particular concept, angle or variable, which is what my research works to unveil and explain in detail – how these trends come to fruition, why they are successful, where they come from, and why the consumer is so convinced to purchase them.

### ***Politics of Fashion – The Cultural Industry***

Although there are many different factors that play into the history and progress of the fashion industry, it is clear that within fashion, there is a set political structure that dictates how things work and how fashion lines are produced. Fashion has been considered through many different lenses. Such perspectives are as a “symbolic system, an aesthetic form, a global industry, a media phenomenon, an individual indulgence or a sign of group membership” (Craik 2009: 284). Craik continues to argue that “clothing and its regulation have been a powerful means of establishing power relations, reaffirming hierarchical structures, articulating gendered habits and asserting ethnic and cultural distinctiveness” (2009: 284). The fashion industry finds itself in heated political struggles regarding third world exploitation for unfair labor in the production of clothes, the use of trends, clothing and fashion in political movements and uprisings. More recent debates, such as those regarding hijabs, veils that cover the faces of Muslim women, sneaker production in exploited factories, and the weight of fashion models are all examples of the cultural politics of fashion, according to Craik (2009: 294). These are everyday issues that can be seen on the news, in magazines, and on social media. The politics of fashion can be described as the political movement politics—how clothes are used as a political statement to create a collective identity.

Craik discusses fashion as being used as a resistance to colonialism; also known as nationalism. By using clothes as a form of self-identity in politics, groups can create a sense of social cohesion amongst themselves for a greater cause (Craik 2009: 292). This group identity works for a greater symbolic purpose of cultural politics. In politics, we can see groups form together and uniting by dressing in the same sort of uniforms, colors, and traditional garments. From culture to culture, the concept of fashion, and the meaning behind it, changes. As cited by Entwistle, Craik, and Benstock and Ferriss, fashion is used as a force of cultural industry and identity persuasion. Throughout the decades, fashion has been used as an outlet for personal expression and the search for self-identity within the limits of social norms.

The trends seem to break and change as the politics of the time change. For example, in the 1960s and 70s, a time of rock and roll, radicalism, and revolution, the fashion trend was to dress unconventionally and break the social norms to subvert the typical style of the time, thus standing out and make a statement of rebellion (Benstock and Ferriss 1994: 161). This perpetual change, as explained by Benstock and Ferriss, is caused by the fear of being ‘out of the times.’ This anxiety of being outdated creates a need to engage in fashion politics, which ultimately creates a change in fashion. This can be easily explained by saying: Clothes are the easiest way to openly express self-opinion, identity, and opposition; as politics change, so does the current trend. In the 1970s, it was also said that expressing the belief that one should articulate one’s ideology through one’s behavior and appearance” (Craik 2009: 292), which compliments Benstock and Ferriss’ idea of perpetual change in self-expression through fashion.

Craik gives an example of the black and white checked headscarf that the Palestinians wore in a campaign for nationalism. The headscarf was considered a veiling for the purpose of activism and to “threaten the balance of power” in the Middle East (306). This was a



homogenous status marker that was used to demonstrate political equality and question those in power—a perfect demonstration of cultural industry and how fashion can create a political sentiment towards personal identity and self-expression. This headscarf later trended into “an alternative fashion item” (292). In modern day, we can see celebrities and fashion icons wearing headscarves, mimicking the political and cultural model of Muslim women. The Iranians in the Iran Green movement in 2009 demonstrate another example of cultural identity and cultural industry through the fashion choices. The citizens that were against the political regime in Iran dressed in all green and took to the street. Fashion became a symbol and a way to express their political stance and aversion towards the repression. These adoptions of “cultural identity” through fashion demonstrate the influence of national dress as a political statement to other countries, cultures, and groups of people.

### ***The Fashion Business***

According to Craik, “fashion cycles are constructed and maintained by style trendsetters, who determine what counts as fashionable at any moment” (Craik 2009: 117). She claims that these styles are decided and deemed ‘trendy’ by the style trendsetters, or as we have been referring to them, the elites. Deriving this complex answer must come from patterns of popularity in the fashion world, who are the elites and how do they create this fashion flow? This concept breaks down into three different categories that are important to analyze, design, production and consumption.

There are so many agents that go into the successful production of a particular fashion cycle, and there are different cycles for companies with different seasons – Some companies only have two seasons, summer and winter, while others can produce up to twenty collections in just one year (Craik 2009: 207). The structure of the fashion industry can be viewed as a supply

chain, beginning with the production of raw materials, moves on to the production of textiles, the design process, garment production, transport to market, retail distribution, visual merchandising and promotions, sales, consumer purchasing, and ends with individual wardrobes (2009: 206).

Although this fashion sequence accounts for almost all levels of the cycle of fashion, it lacks an account for what comes after the clothes enter the individual's closet. Obviously with the constant production and changing of the trends, people recycle their clothes. This concept of recycling and 'second-hand' shopping has not been mentioned in readings, yet contributes in large part to lower class fashion, the economy, the trickle-down theory, and the trickle-up theory. There are four subsystems within the fashion flow process—manufacturing, creative design, managerial system, and a communication system.

Hines, also quoted by Craik, argues that there is a specific aspect in the fashion industry that is not noted in every other supply chain like the one she offered as a simplified example. This industry is completely supply driven, meaning it has no aspect where demand is accounted for, except for the end in consumption. Also, each step in the chain has its own cycle and its own "time frame" for which to produce final products. These deadlines rely on the speed of completion of the previous cycle, making the fashion supply chain very reliant on each contributing agent (2009: 207). The power relations and cost structure of the fashion industry tend to balance the consumer side, making the consumer a "dupe" of the system, as stated by Craik (2009: 208).

Influencing consumer demand is largely driven by the choices of the elites, trendsetters, merchandisers, buyers, celebrities and role models. Fashion, and the business created by it, is made up of a complex web of calculations and analytical planning in order for "companies to remain agile and flexible in order to move with the times" (2009: 212). This creates a difficult

job for the fashion designer, with the entire representation of haute couture resting on their shoulders. The image of the designer as a person and a creative artist remains to be a strong cultural symbol of the fashion world and the countries where they are produced (2009: 220). We can see this with designers like Giorgio Armani and CoCo Chanel, who remain to be engrained visionaries and symbols in the fashion society.

### *Design*

The common definition for “designer” has been the person who envisions and creates the designs for the apparel. The designer serves as a bridge between the clothes and how they are personified to the general public. This creates two general pressures for the designer; first will their collections retain an iconic look? — And second, will they be able to develop her or his own signature, meaning the designer’s personal touch (Craik 2009: 222). These pressures regarding the production of clothes that the consumer feels maintain a general look within social normative guidelines while also being innovative and original to their own personal creativity generates a stressful, high-paced lifestyle for the designer. Again, the fashion world poses another example of constant balancing and careful planning. However, Craik’s idea poses a contradiction in the overall argument that states that the designer has full control as to what the consumer is going to purchase. After explaining it, she claims that the designer must remain within the iconic, normative look that will keep the consumers interest and convince them to buy, thus proving that the consumer does have some sway in what the designer creates and how it is introduced into the world of fashion.

Most Western designers, according to Davis (1992), take their fame and pride in being ‘innovative,’ ‘creative,’ and ‘artistic,’ [...] each attempting to make their mark on fashion history (125). Davis continues to explain where designers get their ideas from, claiming they are

inspired by “everything and everywhere around them.” Their creations are rooted in their optimism and open-minded nature, leaving a clean canvas to provide the opportunity for “just about anything” (128). Gianni Versace was cited saying, “I’m not interested in the past, except as the road to the future” (Morris 1990, Davis 1992: 129). This was interpreted as fashion having previous trends and cycles that lead to the future of fashion design. However, his statement contradicts the idea that fashion repeats itself, mentioned previously by Davis.

It is not secret that as the designers continue to produce different fashions and these trends enter the market, the women will purchase them as to stay up with the times and remove the fear of not being ‘stylish,’ as previously cited by Benstock and Ferriss. “When a woman buys a new top she tries to find something that will go wit it from her wardrobe, yet arrives at the all too frequent conclusion that she has nothing to wear” (Woodward 2007: *Chapter 1*). Woodward goes on to explain how women are constantly “tyrannized” by the collaboration and judgment of other people based on the perception of articles of clothing that can be worn together. McCracken (1988), a cited author, calls this concept ‘complimentary goods’—goods that are purchased without any sense of order; purchases only made for the strict purpose of fashion etiquette based on the proper perception from the public.

Davis cites Kidwell (1989: 141), saying, “The precedent set b the current fashions also influences the kinds of choices that are made [by the consumer].” The designer purposefully makes the next season’s style or unique trends similar to the previous that way the new cycle is adopted fluidly. The designer is careful not to create radical changes from what the consumer was already wearing. Kidwell can contribute to the argument of fashion cycles and the time between each of Brenninkmeyer’s waves by claiming that the force or speed between each

cresting and dissipating wave is gradual, rather than fast and abrupt, so as to break the fashion flow from one season to the next.

Part of the transition is directed by trend forecasting and merchandising. These positions direct and influence the design and production components of the fashion process by predicting, well in advance, what the market will crave in the next fashion cycle. The goal is to predict a trend “from eighteen months to two years” before it becomes an actual trend (Craik 2009: 213). It involves “predicting mood, behavior, and consumer habits by linking demographic information about consumer segments and statistics on trends in retail sales with guessing how and why people buy fashion and how tastes are changing” from one ‘wave,’ or cycle, to the next (2009: 213). This guessing game requires much skill and knowledge of each stage of the fashion process.

Trend forecasters can photograph large crowds of people and analyze similar tastes, they can go to fashion or trade shows, or deduce rejection patterns in order to produce answers as to what *not* to create for the next seasons. They map flows, trickle-up or trickle-down, and work to predict how these cycles and patterns will tie into the future of particular fashion industries and companies (Craik 2009: 214). From an anthropological standpoint, this part of the fashion process can be seen as an ethnographic account of fashion styles. This requires fieldwork and research of groups of people in order to understand their culture and the reasoning behind their decisions, this way, the designer is prepared for fashion shifts and social changes well before they occur. Davis quotes Green (1985) as saying that fashion forecasters must “be plugged in to the underground of cities that are in fashion – everything that’s culture, everything that’s fashion [...]. You need to say, ‘Hey why is this [...] important?’” (Davis 1992: 129). These are specific people that are tuned into the beat and patterns of society and the fashion within it. They must be

good at asking the main questions of how, why and when, and then researching and analyzing to find patterns of the future.

Designers are aware that there are many stages that their original, creative, catwalk designs are screened through before reaching the general population. Blumer (1969) discusses this concept and argues that ‘cultural mediators.’ These mediators are the ones that take the ideas of the past, the creativity of the designer, the means of production in different countries and the want of the consumer in order to establish the current trend that will be accepted by society (Entwistle 2000: 222). Entwistle goes on to support Blumer and claims that all fashion seeks to contradict, object, and divert from the existing fashion (2000: 223). This statement conflicts with the ideas of Kidwell and Brenninkmeyer, who argue that fashion does not digress abruptly, or much at all, from the previous trends in order to create a gradual flow from one trend to another.

### ***Production and Consumption***

Production has a long history regarding the dark side of manufacturing clothes. High-end clothes are produced in factories all over the world, being exported and produced for the bare minimum in sweatshops throughout countries like India, China, and Mexico. Britain was the first country where textile production and large industry was appreciated, especially in their production of cotton (Entwistle 2000: 210.) As with trend forecasting, demographic factors play a huge role. Correlating with the concepts of mass-production versus hand made apparel, Davis says,

“The sheer massiveness and demand constancy of the apparel market, along with, of course, heavy fixed capital investments in clothing manufacture and distribution, combine to restrain unbridled artistic license in couture more than in other arts” (Davis 1992: 127).

The concept of mass production and the continuous need for clothing creates a need for the producer to produce goods quickly and for as little money as possible. This creates some sort of limits as to what the designer can request of the manufacturer; the designer must create fashions within the means of production and the standards that mass production and demand can handle. It seems that it is not so much based on the type of styles wanted by the consumer but rather what the producer can deliver to the buying markets in time for the next fashion cycle (one of the seasons, or one of twenty depending on the company).

As a woman buying a product, the thought process usually involves the questions, “Does this go?” or “Is this me?” (Woodward 2007: *Chapter 1*). When choosing clothes, a woman assumes a particular kind of identity by purchasing a particular article of clothing. In order to be a successful consumer of clothing, the item must become an actual “extension of the person” (2007: *Chapter 1*). Woodward offers the example in her first chapter about a woman “who desires to be fashionable not only has to wear the right pair of skinny grey drainpipe jeans, she also has to have the skinny thighs that go in them” (2007: *Chapter 1*). This supports the idea offered by Craik that the designer influences the individual style, taste, and ultimately body shape, of a woman. Entwistle’s original idea of clothes being a bridge between the public and the private can also be supported by this idea—this idea that the sense of ‘does this go?’ comes from a deeply rooted awareness of external pressures from the public, their social expectations and personal aesthetic of the woman.

Woodward cites Gidden (1991) in her first chapter, saying that clothes are a major source for women to recognize memories and establish “stability in their identity.” Gidden claims that when a woman chooses clothing or picks out a pair of jeans, she creates a piece of her identity and a way to make sense of how her life is at the current moment. Since designers choose the

clothes that are available for purchase, the designer sways the identity of women in some way. However, according to Woodward, it is how that woman mixes, matches, or pairs different articles of clothing together that creates her personal wardrobe, her true identity.

### ***Conclusion***

Throughout history, fashion has been an extremely influential part of human existence. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the help of the Industrial Revolution, it was possible for the world to create a market that offered necessary goods, generating constant expansion and desire for the most popular fashion trends. Many have researched this topic, derived theories about the process of fashion culture, and then modified them to fit their own hypothesis. Although not much anthropological work on Western fashion practices has been performed, there has been discussion of cultural identity through clothes, wardrobe, and the choices, or the rationale behind them.

“We all see the world through our own cultural lenses. To fully understand another culture, you must see the world from their perspective” says an Iowa State University (2011) definition of the term *culture*. When looking into the culture of fashion, it is important to step outside of our own cultural lenses in order to best see and evaluate the things around us. A reason you buy a top might be different than the little boy and his choice for the neon rubber sandals. The play of social, economic, political, gender, and demographic factors create agents that eventually determine an individual wardrobe, a person’s private domain and personal identity.

My research works to discover the answer as to where that desire originates. The next chapters and sections offer my explanation as to how consumers are influenced to purchase trends in a cyclical way. With research and evidence binding proof of case studies, I will analyze



and explain the fashion industry today and the thought processes behind designers, producers, and consumers. Through ethnographic interviews, first hand experience in places like Union College, Schenectady, NY and New York City, I hope to find what perpetuates this constant cycle of buying clothes, how people are influenced to buy specific clothes, and who holds the power in these decisions—the individual, the producers/trend forecasters, or the designers? In a world surrounded by a complicated web of fashion, understanding it is the most important part.

## *Chapter 2. A Word from the Experts*

People all over the world, whether they are inhabitants of a city or giving a dissertation through the pages a textbook, have the ability to interpret, judge, and analyze the purpose and history behind fashion and trends. However, there are certain people that have gained an education or experience in the industry, giving their opinions and personal accounts of the industry a level of credibility. These people may be employed in many different positions and roles throughout the fashion industry, functioning with different responsibilities that work to contribute to the success or failure of a specific trend. These experts have been trained with certain proficiencies – to spot certain repeating patterns, to have a keen eye, and to be particularly concerned by attention to detail and efficiency in their work.

I conducted four main interviews, one with a designer, one with a stylist, one with a celebrity, and one with an editor. These three positions (a long with many others) contribute specific information to the fashion world. Without all the parts, the well-oiled machine of the fashion industry would not run as smoothly, and would eventually fall apart. By creating a symbiotic relationship between all parties involved in the success of a fashion trend, the industry can continue to be successful, develop new looks and, hopefully, find a way to mimic or repeat the trend decades later.

Stephanie, the designer, works to generate the physical product. Designers begin with a piece of paper, sketch some ideas based on previous trends and consumer demands, and find the materials to put it together. They are the beginning of the fashion/trend-creation process. There are many steps in between this position and the one I will discuss next, however they are the positions that I have the most information and research collected from, ultimately making me able to discuss them in greater detail. Daniel Musto, the stylist, takes the trends and the products

that come to fruition and successfully pass all fashion critiques and tests and places them on a person, complimented by the rest of the wardrobe. The stylist takes all the pieces that are created and are seen as ‘trendy’ for a given situation, and creates an outfit, or a look on the physical person; the stylist conveys the chosen identity to the outside world. The celebrity, in this case, Olivia, creates a mannequin and a platform to debut the look and catch the attention of the consumers. Lastly, we have Karina, the editor/writer. She works to explain the story of style to the public. Her role is to create publicity through her writing, which allows the anticipated identity (of the style) present to readers. By seeing pictures and articles about favorite celebrities and talents wearing a look, consumers find a desire to be similar to that person, mimic the trend, and ultimately purchase the clothes. The editor/writer or blogger is the most essential link between the celebrity and the common fashionista. As you continue to read, you will see that this link is a key point in driving the consumer to purchase the product. As this link becomes ‘stronger’ and more important, the consumer feels as though they have gained some sort of status among their peers by dressing like the celebrity the magazines had mentioned.

These experts work together to create a thriving industry that touches upon each and every individual throughout the world. The designers, stylists, and writers are the ones that are behind the scenes working hard to establish networks in the industry. These connections create a symbiotic relationship throughout the field and across a variety of companies. When one person fails to adequately do his or her job, the well-oiled machine hiccups, and fails to perform to its expected potential. Each position in the fashion industry relies on the success of the other one. As they are integral members of this business, the people I interviewed extremely informative in helping to understand the function and purpose of the industry.

### *Stephanie – “The Designer”*

After interviewing Stephanie, a twenty-four year old footwear designer, who works for a well-known shoe company, I was able to delve deeper into the concept of fashion and how and why it is an essential part of life, for a greater reason than covering the bare body. After graduating from Parsons School of Design with a BFA in Fashion Design, her insight serves as a valuable resource. Her interest in fashion derived from her love of drawing, painting, sketching, and creating new ideas, which originated at a young age. She always wanted to “be a part of a world where [she] could wear anything [she] wanted and be able to express [herself] without being judged” (Stephanie Interview). To her, that was the definition of fashion—the central idea that people can wear anything she wants without being judged by others. The idea that fashion is an integral part of life and society created her curiosity in putting her art skills and passion for fashion to good use, however she would eventually come to realize that consumerism and buying clothes consists of decisions that are influenced by peers and expectations.

I’ll begin with a story she shared to me after claiming that “The Devil Wears Prada is a true story!!” (Stephanie Interview). She explained that when working in the fashion industry, it is not hard to succumb to what is chic and trendy.

“When I was in line to get a promotion at work, one of the supervisors told me that my boss really admires what I do and thinks I have a great future in the company, but in order to get a higher ranking I need to up my game a little. She used the phrase ‘fake it until you make it.’ For instance, if I am out shopping with Sam and he says he likes something, I should try to find a similar thing for myself at a cheaper price, because I can’t afford the Manolo Blahniks that he pointed out, to show that I believe in the same trends and want to wear them. So, I gave it a shot. In about a month I got a promotion. I can’t say it was a bad thing because I definitely like everything I bought...but it does demonstrate how consumers, especially ones that work in the industry, are forced into trends” (Stephanie Interview).

Her statement, “fake it until you make it” demonstrates a major concept that the fashion industry believes in. If the high-end designers are making shoes or clothes with specific design trends, you must pretend you love them and recreate them at an affordable price. This is how the trends come in and out of mainstream fashion—they are orchestrated by the high-end designers and mimicked by those in lower-price brackets. By showing that she was open minded and willing to adapt her personal style to please a given trend, her boss was convinced that she was ready for a promotion. Her acceptance of something different prepared her to design shoes and clothes that were out of her comfort zone, which definitely says something about top-tier, mainstream fashion. People, consumers and designers, are pushed and pressured by exterior forces to manifest a product for other people to interpret.

She explained to me that “over the course of [her] experience and training in the fashion world, [she has] realized that fashion isn’t only something that is translated through clothing and accessories, [but rather] it is the complete way of life surrounding a certain time period. The fashion of the time can be seen not only in clothing, but also in furniture, appliances, interior design, architecture, and anything that has a designer’s touch. Fashion is anything that reflects the zeitgeist, or ‘spirit of the time’” (Stephanie Interview). By this, Stephanie explains how people can find the beauty and art of fashion in anything. This concept of the ‘spirit of time’ can provide evidence of repeating cyclical trends that continue to appear overtime in the fashion world, especially regarding clothing. It brings back memories and emotions of a specific era that give the clothes designed in a similar way a sense of nostalgia and authenticity.

It is interesting to see the way a designer looks at the world of fashion, because according to Stephanie, their perspective is quite different than the view of a consumer. “The designing side of fashion is definitely much different than the consumer side. Being a designer, it is

extremely hard to also be a consumer. [She] can't look at clothing the same way anymore while shopping," because her job is to stay ahead of the consumer. She claims that "this means that [she is] doing my [her] job right" because she can take her inspiration from high-end fashion, and she is trained to notice trends far in advance.

"I have to keep in mind when designing that I am a designer in New York City– I understand and see trends much earlier than a consumer in the mid-west. If I design footwear that is too "forward" for them, they may not understand it. So, when designing, I constantly have to think to myself – will the consumer understand this? Many customers like to have a point of reference for what they wear. They want to know it is a trend and they want to have seen it elsewhere, [creating a link to the tiers above theirs]. So if I wait for one more season to put the shoe in stores the trend may have evolved a bit, giving the customer a reason to want it. Or, another designer may have taken the risk and put the style out there (and succeeded), giving me a disadvantage because they had it first" (Stephanie Interview).

Her description of the designer's role in fashion offers an explanation to how and why designers have the power to establish these trends. They "have been trained" to see trends long before they develop, as I did during my internship in New York City. Designers, and writers, are expected to have a keen eye for fashion and style, which also pays close attention to detail. Designers have the power to predict and assume what will be popular next in order to get the design and product on the market before other companies do it. Being the first to release a style, just as magazine or online website should be the first to release an article or news of a story, offers an advantage to that company.

The purpose of fashion, as described by Stephanie, is the ability to "express yourself via what you decide to wear and surround yourself with every day. It has evolved into this extremely materialistic world, but the bottom line is that it is a means of depicting to the world your personal identity, or ultimately, who you want to be. Even if you are the type that puts on the "I don't care what I look like" outfit, that's still your style, and your fashion is saying that you don't

care about fashion” (Stephanie Interview). There is something inescapable about style and fashion. Everyone has to put something on in the morning and eventually show herself, or himself, to the world. Clothing and fashion is a method that humans subconsciously use to present themselves to strangers, and the world.

It is important to recognize where designers receive their influence and their sense of personal style. “It is difficult to make it in the fashion industry without having fashion sense” (Stephanie Interview). As a little kid, Stephanie was influenced by role models and celebrities of pop culture—she would try to copy what her favorite singers or actresses were wearing on TV and in magazines. She gives this example:

“In 4<sup>th</sup> grade I went through a phase where I HAD TO HAVE platform sneakers and a duster because that is what the Spice Girls were wearing. Looking back, I think I did realize what was happening, you know, me being influenced by celebrities. I didn’t want to look like everyone else in the small, suburban community. I wanted to look like my favorite celebrities! I remember one day in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I came to school wearing capri pants. It was when they first started to come back. I got ridiculed ALL DAY – kids were saying ‘You left the other half of your pants at home.’ I remember saying ‘Don’t worry, you’ll be wearing these soon too.’ Sure enough, they were. Obviously there were days when it bothered me, but my mom would always tell me that I was more sophisticated than them and I was a *trendsetter*” (Stephanie Interview).

This example clearly supports the main premises of my thesis, the concept that states: Celebrities begin and create the trend that common people, or lower tiers, want to recreate, mimic, and wear to establish a sense of status among their peer group. Stephanie’s story demonstrates that someone, usually a trained eye, must first acknowledge the trends on celebrities, buy clothes that are similar and be the first to wear them within their class groups. At first people will reject the look and will not accept the style that the “trendsetter” is wearing, as it is new and out of the norm, however, eventually it will become desirable and the newest trend to wear. The important thing to realize here is that the trend was initiated by magazines and television vis à vie the

fashion choices made by celebrities and people that classify themselves as members of the top tier.

In response to the celebrity trendsetters being members of the top tier, they are the ones that kick start the trend, not necessarily the ones that give success to the trend. This power is left in the hands of the designer—people like Stephanie. The designers create the trends from scratch on a plain piece of paper. However, their designs and ideas must originate from somewhere. So we must ask ourselves, where and how do designers develop their inspiration or ideas? Stephanie's response:

Culture. No matter where you are in the world, culture is always the driving force in the fashion of the time. For example, the culture of music festivals is homage to the 60s and Woodstock – music, drugs, and being a free spirit. It's not a coincidence that right now Birkenstocks and 60s clothing are coming back as a trend. Sam [Edelman, CEO of Sam Edelman] is totally inspired by this and keeps calling it the "Jenny Gump." Fashion always responds directly to what is going on in society. One of my professors at Parsons once told me there was study being conducted that was trying to prove designers were showing shorter skirts during times when the economy was going through rough patches (less material, less cost). It's always interesting to see how what we wear directly correlates with what's going on in the immediate culture" (Stephanie Interview).

Since fashion has the power to change as the seasons, or cultural moments, do, I can speculate with confidence that a person's identity changes with time. The body functions as a canvas, used to manufacture identities that contribute a given message to society at a crucial time, based on particular expectations of surrounding peers, cultural or political happenings or changes, and personal growth.

Stephanie's response also demonstrates how fashion repeats itself over time, with designers reinventing and reevaluating designs and styles of the past. She explains how her experiences working in the fashion industry, especially as a designer, have shown her that "style and trends are constantly changing" (Stephanie Interview). As she mentioned before, the



exterior events or cultural advances allow fashion to evolve. The designs and given trends are sporadic and usually created in a random instant in the design studio, allowing them to dissipate as quickly as they were created. Stephanie provided an example – colored denim. In the fall of 2012 and 2013 they were a huge trend, sold by every company of every tier, every brand, in almost any color. This fall, 2014, you cannot, and will not be able to, find them if you wanted to. Instead, the trend moved to dark denim or camouflage denim. Stephanie also mentioned that in the past we have seen trends like flare leg jeans (similar to bell-bottoms) as a major trend in the early 2000s. They were also a huge hit in the 1970s and 1980s. Although skinny/straight-leg jeans are the most popular cut right now, the flare-leg jean will recycle itself, slowly but surely. The style can already be spotted in some stores or magazines. The old looks seem to be able to recycle themselves and come back into the fashion world and commercial markets because they provide something ‘new’ and ‘different’ along with a touch of nostalgia of past decades. This style is different from all the other looks offered in the magazine, therefore it becomes desirable to the consumer, eventually creating popularity and functioning as a trend.

The same way that they can repeat over time, these looks and trends can also subtly change over time. Style is constantly changing due to exterior pressures, demand from particular cultural pressures, and personal growth and changes. This compilation of factors can hinder the judgment of the consumer in a way that allows his or her opinion of fashion to transform. She offers an example, “Just from living in New York and being engulfed into the fashion world, my personal style has definitely grown and matured” (Stephanie Interview). As a different environment has surrounded her for many years (a small town with no street lights or sidewalks), she has been able to mature and grow as an individual. This has been evident in her fashion choices and conveyed through the wardrobe she decides to wear each day.

These trends and styles that we have been talking about have to have derived from someplace. As a designer, Stephanie draws ideas from other looks, already created by high-end, famous designers. In our discussion, she explained that there are specific politics surrounding the fashion world that discuss this issue.

“There is a fine line between copying and being inspired by something, and it’s a line that we [designers] teeter on constantly. Since our company is “aspirational” (meaning we take inspiration from high-end designers that our customer would like to own, but cannot afford), we want to create the same look as the designers we draw inspiration from. However, we have to make sure we do so in a way that we don’t violate trademark or trade-dress rules. Everyone copies everyone in fashion. I don’t think fashion will ever be at a point where lower price brackets won’t copy higher ones” (Stephanie Interview).

In this, Stephanie indirectly mentions the trickle-down theory and the different tiers of the fashion world, ideas that were mentioned in my literature review by other thinkers of this topic. She admits that the inspiration from the top designers must come from culture and the constantly changing atmosphere and expectations of society. The design ideas proceed to trickle-down from the high-end levels to the tiers below the catwalk designers. She states the concept of “aspirational” design and mentions how her company creates shoes and products for people that aspire to own the designs of the top tier, yet cannot produce the means to afford it. This explains how the trickle-down theory works and the role it plays in trend development, sales and merchandising. When she “redesigns” the styles from higher-up brands, she, as well as other designers, must use caution so as to not mimic a design too exactly. This is important to recognize in the fashion world because it gives purpose to each tier, and the designers or manufacturers in each tier.

The lower-price brackets, as Stephanie refers to them, mimic the designs of the higher-price brackets because those are the desirable styles. Consumers aspire to own such pieces, and if they cannot afford them, they browse a price-bracket that they can afford. At this point, I

would like to call attention to the concept of brands and labels in fashion. Designer names usually come with a level of social status based on their price-bracket or past success. These names can gain status if a particular celebrity wears them, based upon their price tag (making them rare and hard to purchase), if they are extremely desirable, or if they are featured in a fashion show, a magazine, a television show, or a movie. For example, we can see this when we examine,

“How fashion has infiltrated the political world – think of all the hype surrounding Michelle Obama and her being a ‘fashion icon.’ She is clearly not as legendary as Jackie O, but is well known for giving designer Jason Wu his kick-start. People have become obsessed with what she is wearing. The same goes for Kate Middleton. Fashion is the way they connect to the people and show the media/society who they are. If you want to give off the persona of relatable, friendly, girl next door, you go the Kate Middleton route and recycle a dress from Zara. It’s a way for a political, or famous, figure to relate and speak to the masses” (Stephanie Interview).

From a famous political figure spotlight, these are two great examples of how fashion can connect them to the citizens. Their identities, goals and intentions can be portrayed through what they are wearing, how much they spent on their clothes, and where they purchased them.

Consumers that want to appear the same way or feel as though they have the same identity and ambitions as people like Michelle Obama or Kate Middleton (well known fashion icons of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) are able to get these clothes, or mimic the look, and create a link (of assumed status) between themselves and the celebrities.

When discussing any celebrity, there is always a writer who works, or has worked, to explain the look or the style and give this particular garment status and recognition, causing the trend to kick-start. For this reason, we can see how the designers rely on the fashion writers to give them publicity. Readers and consumers would never know who made a particular blouse or shirt without a fashion magazine or blog explaining it or pointing it out. But before this can

happen, the design must come to fruition and be put on a celebrity by the stylist. These positions are part of the well-oiled machine, which make the fashion industry run smoothly

### *Daniel Musto – “The Stylist”*

Daniel Musto is a 28-year-old celebrity stylist who has been featured on many different television shows, and according to his bio on his website, is a “member of the Costume

Designers Guild, [and] understands the fundamentals of how to make someone look—and, by extension, feel their very best” (“About Daniel Musto”). The stylist’s role in the fashion industry is to create looks and trends on the physical body of the actress, singer, or celebrity in order to portray a certain image. A stylist must have a keen, unbiased eye and pay close attention to detail in order to make certain looks attract the attention of viewers, and ultimately consumers.

I spoke to Daniel regarding a photo shoot

that he had been working on for *Teen Beach Movie*, which premiered on the Disney Channel on July 19, 2013.



**Figure 2.** This is the photo used in the online article I wrote about Daniel Musto after his interview that was published on July 18, 2013. The full article can be viewed at <http://hollywoodlife.com/2013/07/18/teen-beach-movie-style-outfits-interview-daniel-musto/>

This was a 95-minute, low-budget film whose plot told the story of two rival cliques of high school students, the surfers and the bikers in an imaginary world of “Wet Side Story,” (a play on “West Side Story”), set in the 1960s. As the majority of the film is set in a time 50 years ago, he was able to recreate the styles from the past for the photo shoot taking place in modern day. This movie allowed Daniel to utilize his trained, stylist skills in order to highlight the repetition of particular fashion trends and recreate a fascinating era in just a few pictures.

After speaking with Daniel, he had some highlights in his experience and some difficulties with refashioning the 60s style. “To boost the film’s fashion appeal, Disney [asked stylist] Daniel Musto to help with a photo shoot starring the films leading roles in retro-inspired outfits from current brands like Forever 21, Zara and Topshop” (Lipke 2013). In doing this, he took bits and pieces of the looks used in the movie combined with his own ideas and inspirations. “I got the call to do it and immediately found inspiration online; I Googled everything and did my research” (Daniel Musto Interview). This research allowed him to come across some interesting looks and ultimately create authentic, 60s-era looking styles.

In his interview, he mentioned that he did not review the work of any stylist that previously recreated the look, but rather decided to go back to the past and look at actual pictures of the 60s and what people were wearing. He came across “Twiggy and basically stalked her photos” (Daniel Musto Interview). He then ventured into the films of the era. After finding inspiration and gathering substantial data and examples of the looks he wanted to replicate, he was ready to create and plan what the set would look like. Once the set was ready, he dressed the actors.

“So we went and picked things out; we went shopping. The fashions we used are brands that are in the store, ones that they could buy and wear if they wanted to Get the Look and find the same trends” (Daniel Musto Interview).

Daniel Musto explains that the clothes he put on the actors were available to the general public—brands that are affordable to the middle tiers. By having celebrities wear these clothes, it offers a link to the consumer who aspires to dress similarly. This action of mimicking the looks, or the refabricating of outfit, from celebrity to consumer that allows the person to establish a sense of social status among their peers, whom most likely wish to obtain the same fashions or styles.

Musto's role in the fashion industry is to make the trend look as desirable as possible on a given canvas so that the writers and editors can explain the trend in a way that will ultimately produce as many sales for the designer as possible. With these responsibilities in mind, he worked to get the look and style across to the viewer with intention.

“We were definitely trying to blast the trend right in front of everyone and really do everything over the top – Usually you wouldn't do the big hair, the big earrings, the big dress, everything big. But we did it in order to put the trend right in front of the viewer, so now he or she can pick apart the pieces that they like and rock them in their own personal way” (Daniel Musto Interview).

Daniel really appreciates individuality and personal identity for each actor, or celebrity, that he is styling. In his interview, he continued to refer to the individual actor or actress, or the individual consumer that would be interested in recreating the look they saw on their favorite celebrities. This shed light upon an important aspect of the purpose of fashion. By imitating the look that celebrities offer to society from the top tier, individuals have the power and ability to ultimately create their own look from what they see. They can pick and choose which accessories or trends are most characteristic to their identity and are then able to establish a personal touch to their wardrobe. I can conclude that the power of fashion is deeper than what is seen at surface level, and requires consumers to determine which parts of a given trend they admire, then mixing and matching them in order to create their own personal identity.

Daniel's job also entails him to 'creative direct' the set, where he was asked to incorporate

props, offering a great opportunity for him to really substantiate the past. His set had a white backdrop in order for all the bright colors, an essential characteristic of 60s fashion, to better stand out. Daniel explained that the hardest part was “definitely using the color, but without being too colorful, if that makes sense. It’s hard to keep the colors bright and vibrant, like they were back then, without being too rainbow-y. Everyone wore the clothes well and we had great bloggers so it worked out well” (Daniel Musto Interview). He emphasized the importance of using the right amount of color without drowning out the purpose of the photo. It is important to recognize the role of the celebrity as the mannequin and canvas for the stylist to succeed in advertising the designs of the designer and push the trends onto the wallets of the consumer.

### ***Olivia Holt – “The Celebrity”***

The celebrity functions as an essential member of the well-oiled machine that is the fashion industry. Olivia Holt, a sixteen-year-old actress, (who was fifteen-years-old at the time of this interview), is in the middle of her teenage years, which are known to be the most impressionable on a young woman. For the first decade of her life, she was a country girl living in Tennessee. Upon the success of her acting career as Kim on the Disney XD series *Kickin’ It*, and her starring role in the Disney Channel movie, *Girl vs. Monster*, she and her supportive family moved to Los Angeles, California. Her experiences demonstrate the role of the celebrity and how trends can change depending on surrounding culture and social influences.

Olivia mentioned that when she moved to Los Angeles, she discovered different trends and styles that she never knew existed when she lived in Tennessee. She transformed her footwear from cowboy boots to “worn-out leather combat boots” (Olivia Interview). She explained that her move to the west coast allowed her to try new things, but in the same way encouraged her to keep parts of her wardrobe that were unique to her new friends in California,

like her cowboy boots with spikes on the back or her summer dresses. This demonstrates how culture plays a serious role on a person's fashion decisions. When surrounded by a new environment, different social pressures, and changed expectations, a personal wardrobe can undergo serious changes.

As a celebrity, Olivia has a lot of people paying attention to her comments, her decisions, her actions and her wardrobe. I asked her what her typical outfit would be, and she told me, "it really and truly depends on where I'm going. Once I put on an outfit, I make sure I'm comfortable and if I'm not.... Then I change. If I'm wearing heels and I'm not comfortable, then I change. Being comfortable is the first step to being confident" (Olivia Holt Interview). In my opinion, this is a typical response of a fifteen-year-old girl, however there is something important to be noted in her answer. Confidence, and self-respect or admiration, derives from how a person feels in his or her clothes. Olivia mentions that if she does not feel comfortable, then she changes because she wants to feel confident. This confidence will allow her to be a good role model to her fans and make respectable and responsible choices in her daily life. Being a celebrity has a lot more to do with how people perceive you based on what you are wearing and how you wear it, rather than how you perceive and interpret fashion.

Olivia was the only interview that required the presence of an agent, lawyer, or publicist that had to verify, or confirm, that she could answer a question before speaking. The celebrity holds influence upon her fans and people that read magazines or blogs with what she chooses to wear, ultimately persuading the consumer to want to establish a link to appearing that way as well. In the same way the celebrity has influence based on appearance, he or she has influence based on what they say in interviews or in a public setting. Her role takes the trend that was seen on the runway and brings it to real life on the streets of Hollywood or Los Angeles. There,



magazines and blogs see these icons wearing particular trends or brands, write about them, and get the consumer thinking, wanting and buying. The celebrity allows the trend to be noticed, but it is the job of the writer to deliver knowledge to the consumer so they can find it, buy it, and try it.

***Karina – “The Writer/Editor”***

Karina is a twenty-eight year old woman who works as the Fashion Director of the online celebrity magazine/blog, *Celebritylife.com*, where I worked as an intern for the summer of 2013. She graduated with a BA from the University of Delaware in 2007. From there she entered the fashion world, working in different roles and has ultimately found herself working in a very important position. Working as a Fashion Director in a status-driven society is extremely high-stress, especially when the position is at an online celebrity gossip magazine. Her role in this fashion industry machine is to convey and explain the trends that designers, stylists and celebrities have brought to fruition. She explained, “my job is to immerse myself in the upcoming collections, making me responsible for trend forecasting and predicting what will be popular next” (Karina Interview). Her write-up and acknowledgement of the looks give consumers the information they need to access the brands and recreate the wardrobe of the celebrities. Karina’s job ties the pieces together—after the clothes have been designed by people like Stephanie, styled by people like Daniel, and worn by a celebrity like Olivia, Karina gives an origin to the clothes, answers to the questions, and tells people how to find exact or similar items.

Karina’s opinion slightly differs from the knowledge and information given from other interviews because her position requires more of an opinion and critique of the looks, simultaneously remaining unbiased and supportive of all designers and looks. While she, and all fashion writers, are encouraged to, and do, mention their opinions regarding a particular trend or

fashion decision, it remains in their best interest to encourage the success of all trends in order to build amicable rapport with designers, stylists, magazines, and all other affiliates in support of perpetuating the fashion industry. Karina's attitude towards the purpose of fashion differs from others because she believes that it is, first, "one of the truest forms of self-expression and individuality – although that isn't always the case—sometimes it is used to create uniformity and can even hinder individuality, oppressing people" (Karina Interview), and secondly, a platform to establish a sense of social status and glamour.

Karina was first attracted to the world of fashion because she finds it to be a beautiful escape for people to tell their personal story. From a very young age, "[she] was attracted to the intricate detailing of costumes, the way sequins reflected in the light, the sound of bangles clacking together" (Karina Interview), which is similar to my personal story. In short, it was the pretty, shiny side of fashion and the idea of getting all dressed up that really attracted us to this world that appears to be all glitz and glam. Karina referred to the times of her childhood when she used to page through magazines to see new styles and the current campaigns. She recalled the juxtaposition of blending fashion with nature in the elaborate, high-end fashion ads. These were the campaigns in the magazines that really struck her as truly beautiful and ultimately got her interested in the industry. She went on to say,

"I was also extremely drawn to vintage clothing and jewelry, mainly because I think it's amazing to think of the backstory behind some of these pieces. I also love reworking them with the current trends, blending the old and new styles together to create something totally new and of the moment – and that's what fashion is all about" (Karina Interview).

Extremely early in our interview, Karina brought up the importance of vintage pieces in modern fashion, emphasizing that the combination of old and new is an inherent concept to the world of fashion and how it perpetually recreates itself and recycles looks over time. According to Karina,

“styles definitely evolve, change, and repeat over time. You cannot put a distinct mark on how frequently they turn over because it is not a structured thing. It really has to do with the particular culture and inspiration of the times. It is always interesting to see how different a given trend is the second time around, the first time they are classic, but they bring a unique look when they are recycled” (Karina Interview). Her discussion of the trends repeating was stressed many times throughout our conversation. Therefore, I can conclude that the idea of trends being recycled and revisited over time is an essential function that contributes to the development and success of the well-oiled fashion industry machine.

Karina recalls her first fashion influences—books, magazines, and museums—just the culture in New York. She has lived in New York City her entire life, and being surrounded by the diverse, melting-pot style culture proved to have a huge impact on her fashion style.

“Inspiration of trends comes from all around you – and your style is different every time you get dressed. I’m not sure if you always acknowledge this as it’s happening, but you definitely feel it as ideas begin to come to you and just a vision of something begins to excite you and really opens the flood gates of your creative side” (Karina Interview). This slow process of observation, cultural influence, media persuasion, and personal-identity works to create individual fashion sense and the sharpened eye that notices details and trends as they begin to form in society. She mentioned that she had always been drawn to extremely feminine, pretty things, and, to this day, gravitates to those looks today. As a young girl, she loved the images of women getting all dressed up to go to the theater or the opera in New York. Today, the gowns on the runway leave her in awe, especially during memorable moments like fashion week or on celebrities during awards season. Although style and taste evolves, in the fashion world and for each person individually, there are some looks that are always appealing to a person’s identity,

especially if it allows them to recall a moment in childhood or a happy memory (Karina Interview). This proves how influential fashion is to the individual life in many different ways.

As described by Karina, style, like anything else, progresses, develops and transforms over time (Karina Interview). There are a plethora of factors that trigger these changes. In the same way we, as individuals, are constantly evolving, so does our sense of style and clothing, an essential part of all cultures. For example, depending on where an individual is in their personal life (just out of college, entry-level position, CEO, mother of two), a slight change in their style is noticeable. For this reason, we can see fashion as a true form of self-expression and tells a story of a person's life, successes and struggles. Aside from where an individual may be in their personal life, their social or economic class status, their emotional stability, their title and housing situation, (to name a few), the individual is influenced by popular culture and the current trends, seen on both the runways, in magazines, on social media, and on celebrities. Since clothes, as a method to cover the naked flesh, are a necessity in the vast majority of countries and villages throughout the world, fashion has an ability to maintain a level of power over a culture, affecting the citizens and natives individually and as members of their prescribed society.

Depending on the culture, nation or city that a person considers 'his' or 'her home,' fashion has the ability to vary in many different ways. It is a true form of self-expression and has an impact when it comes to making first impressions. In my opinion, human individual-to-individual contact relies on the instinct of first impressions. What a person chooses to wear is based directly off of that individual's past experiences, beliefs, cultural and social influences, economic status, et cetera. This proves that there is a direct correlation between fashion, the individual, and his or her respective culture.

"It is fascinating to notice how fashion varies among different cultures. Fashion also meets function in some cases, geographically, and you can also see where

functional fashion comes into play. Historically, if you look back and strictly observe fashion and how it evolved over time it tells a powerful story of the history and the culture and what was happening at that time” (Karina Interview).

Here, Karina makes a valid anthropological observation. The evolution of fashion over time differs from culture to culture based on their own culturally relative histories— moments, events, and triggers that have influenced the development of a culture. Functional fashion plays a larger role in some cultures than it does in others. For (a very simplified) example, in hockey, a sport that has two blades on top of ice, the players need to wear helmets for functional fashion. Figure skaters are not required to, and do not need to, wear helmets because the function of the sport differs. From culture to culture, similar circumstances can occur, causing cultures to invest, adapt and change their fashion culture to the functional needs of the society.

With this, Karina does not believe that the sole power of the fashion industry relies in the hands of the one individual or group. As I have previously defended and concluded, Karina also believes that the fashion industry is comparable to a well-oiled machine made up of important, necessary parts. She explains that “designers create collections while buyers and stylists can ask for modifications after the looks are released” (Karina Interview). This ‘team’ works together in order to make the world of fashion run smoothly, from season to season, collection to collection. A collection on the runway, or catwalk, is still in stages when it is debuted – what designers eventually manufacture can be, and usually will be, quite different. The clothes purchased by buyers and consumers are based on the inspiration of the looks the designers pushed down the runway during fashion week or major events. Consumers, however, are the individuals that will eventually purchase these looks and establish the popularity of trends. “If a department store purchases a particular collection, but then it doesn’t sell when it’s in the store, (demonstrating that the consumers aren’t interested in it), the store will not be quick to purchase that line again”

(Karina Interview). Her statement demonstrates that although designers, buyers, stylists and celebrities can kick-start the trend, “set the tone” (Karina Interview), and offer it to the public, the consumers are the ones that determine how popular or successful it is once it hits stores and hits the middle, common tier.

Karina believes that consumers influence the looks in a specific way. With the variety of social media platforms and the speed that individuals can send or receive information, consumers no longer have to wait around to see a magazine in four months; they are looking at designs that are in the design process via a picture posted by the actual designer in the studio. “Social media has really broken down a wall in the fashion industry and has made the conversation between consumer and designer more fluid and direct than ever before” (Karina Interview). In this, she brings up a point that many authors and researchers of this topic have not mentioned, simply because they have not had the opportunity to do so. Most of the books regarding the history of fashion, the culture of design, et cetera, were written well before the times of *Instagram*, *Twitter* and *Facebook*. These platforms allow common consumers to self-educate on the topic of fashion, create their own trend forecasts, and discover the latest news in the fashion industry as it occurs in real time. The purpose of the fashion writer is more important than ever. Karina holds the power to function as an immediate liaison between celebrities, designers, and stylists and the common consumer. This role, I can conclude, has the most influence over what trends, items, and products the consumers choose to purchase and add to their wardrobe.

### ***Conclusion***

In order to understand why consumers continue to purchase new clothes, even if their closets are already overflowing, one must understand how the business works from within. As I have stated before, the fashion industry functions as a well-oiled machine engineered by precise

parts that serve specific purposes. Their roles are very different from one another, some are creative, some are innovative, and some are able to pay attention to detail and write extremely quickly. Regardless of their individual duties, as a fully functioning unit, these roles are able to work together to offer fluidity and consistency to the fashion industry.

As we saw from the interview with Stephanie, the designer must be ahead of the trends. He or she must be able to spot trends (this is called trend forecasting) and pull pieces of clothes from different collections and speculate what will be popular in the future. He or she will also draw from his or her own artistic ability, creative mind, and trained skills in order to produce sketches, designs, and products that the consumer will love and purchase in the following seasons. The stylist draws on inspiration from other designers, similar to the methods of the designer, however their role is to put the styles on the canvas of an actress, model, celebrity, et cetera. They are expected to manifest a look that incorporates themes, inspirations and sends a message to the viewer in a given situation. The celebrity serves as the canvas to convey the look and ultimately catch the attention of fans and consumers. This allows the trend to be kick-started. Next, the writer, editor, journalist, or blogger will consume themselves with writing and reporting on the latest garments and fashions being worn by the top tier celebrities and fashion gurus. This role creates a link between the celebrity and the consumer by informing the lower tiers on where these fashions can be purchased and how they can obtain similar getups or ensembles. As a team, these positions create an institution with the ability to perpetuate the cycles of fashion collection after collection, year after year.

The glitz and glamour of the fashion world is all based on inspiration from cultures around the world, current social and political events in these cultures, and social pressures from peers and surrounding influences. These innovative ideas are transformed into stylish concepts

that are completely new or reinvented designs from past decades. After the ideas and designs are created, they are pushed to the stylist, who contrives ways to make these items look glamorous, chic and trendy on a given physique. The celebrity is advised to wear these particular clothes and from a slew of managers, publicists and advisors who inform the given celebrity as to what is best for their image and with who to maintain amicable relationships (regarding designers and stylists). From there, the paparazzi follow the celebrities around and then the editors and writers report on what they had seen and what this could mean about the future of fashion. They ultimately advise consumers on how to look like the top tier, famous celebrities or role model that are seen on television or heard on the radio.

I believe that Karina raised a noteworthy topic regarding how social media has changed the world of fashion. Although magazines still fly off of the newsstands and people do acknowledge fashion in this way, the Internet allows people to search for trends, view *Instagram* or *Twitter* accounts or follow a favorite blog or website. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, consumers have the ability to gather as much fashion data as they desire, giving consumers the ability to perform their own trend forecasts and develop their own sense of what is ‘chic.’ However, the people that work in the industry have a true level of power and influence in what people decide to wear and what people find to be ‘in,’ ‘trendy,’ or even ‘sexy.’ The constant need to be fashionable (wearing the current trends and being up to date on the latest looks) is something that surrounds the life of every human, more so, in my opinion, women. Women are easily influenced by their peers and hope to create a sense of status through their clothing choices and fashion knowledge. By waking up each morning and getting dressed, women are conveying their identities to the others around them. By doing this, they are creating equilibrium or even a level of competition amongst each other. Never the less, the fashion industry knows this, and for this reason, can



continue to produce new styles, knowing people will continue to buy them. In different cultures, women can be influenced in diverse ways to wear specific things based upon cultural expectations, pressures, and political or social movements. Now that we understand how the fashion industry and cycles work, we must look into the influences of a particular culture to understand why they, specifically, are wearing specific outfits and trends at certain times.

### ***Chapter 3. New York City: A Melting Pot of Fashion Personalities***

During the summer of 2013, I spent my time as a fashion intern for a company called *Celebritylife.com*. There, I was able to experience, first-hand, how the fashion business works and how mass media perpetuates the necessity and presence of the industry. I worked under the direction of the fashion director, Karina. With her guidance, I was able to effectively establish rapport, contribute to the field, and learn the language of this particular culture. The best way to convey my experience is to give stories as to what happened during these three months and give specific accounts into the fashion world of New York City.

I moved into Columbia University housing on 116<sup>th</sup> and Broadway in the middle of June 2013. My parents drove away after helping me move my entire wardrobe and essentials into my new dorm room. As their car left my sight, I turned around to head back into the apartment and realized I was on my own, and I had finally made it to New York City. As a small town girl from upstate Massachusetts, this had been a dream of mine, which finally had come true. That Sunday night, I spent about three hours picking out what I was going to wear for my first day as a fashion intern. Previously, I had only worked at business and finance firms, so in a habitual act, I laid out my best dress pants, a white clean t-shirt and my suit jacket. I wore closed-toe low pumps and my hair in a tight ponytail—business ready.

I got off the subway stop at 42<sup>nd</sup> street and headed to the office building. I checked in at the front and told the man at the desk that I was a Fashion Intern for *Celebritylife.com*; he then proceeded to head me in the direction of the appropriate set of elevators (because the building had two). I reached the 22<sup>nd</sup> floor at approximately 8 am, thirty minutes before I was supposed to be there, and my heart dropped. In my business-attire get-up and my briefcase, looking back on it, I probably looked like I was going to sue the place. A young girl in a high-waisted skirt and

a crop top greeted me and showed me to my desk. There were already two other fashion interns there, typing frantically on their MacBooks. I sat between them and we made small talk, one was one year older than I was, Cailyn, and the other was two years younger, Oli. I asked about the process and what my day would be like, assuming I would go through a few days of training, as I did in my other internships at financial institutions. Much to my surprise one of the interns asked for my email address and I suddenly had my first story in my inbox: Miranda Cosgrove's dress at the premiere of her new film, *Despicable Me 2*. Cailyn walked me through my first time on WordPress; I took frantic notes, and was on my own, and it was 8:22 am.

My boss walked in around 9:00 am and called for all stories to be forwarded to her email. With no introduction between us I told her that I would be done within ten minutes, as it was my first story. Karina sighed, but maintained her gaze to her computer. I knew that I was in for a very different experience than I had ever undergone before. I sent her my first story when it was complete, and it was published to the World Wide Web. About twenty minutes later, when I was up to my eyeballs in story requests, the editor-in-chief yelled across the entire publishing room, "Fashion? Who wrote the Miranda story?" across the entire workspace. I sank into my seat and froze. She asked again and knowing I had to respond, I told her that I was the one who had written the story. She called me over and explained how terrible it was and to start again—so I did.

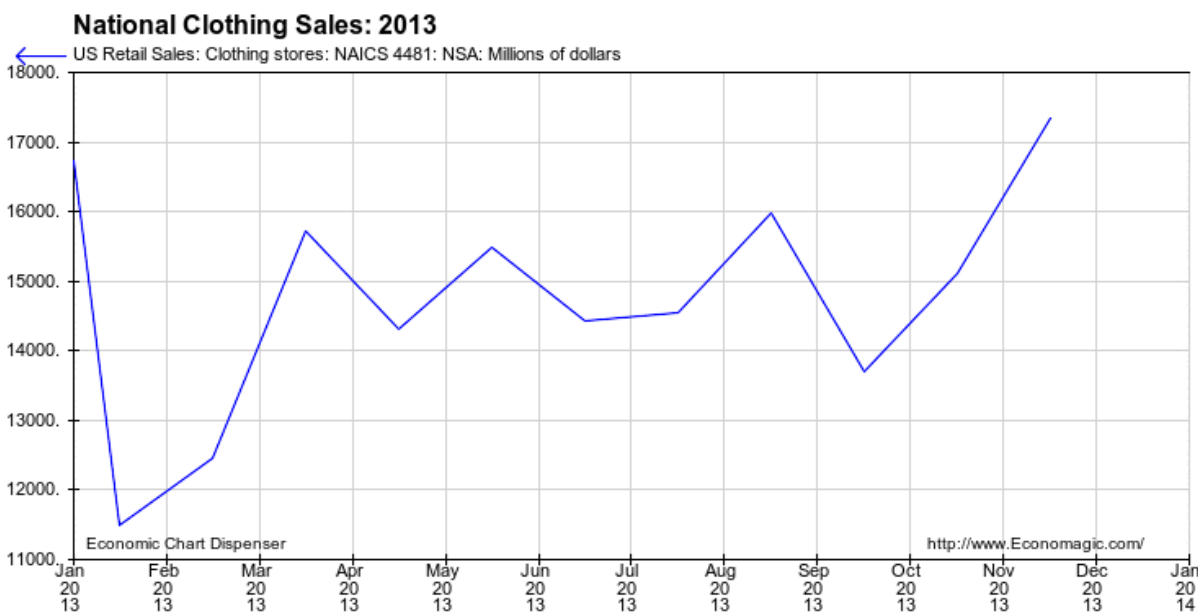
From that point on I understood the work environment I had just entered. I realized that I had to arrive early and leave late, take criticism and expect to write stories eight times before they were finally perfected and publish. The fashion industry was a unique animal, fast-paced and constantly changing. Six stories later, it was lunchtime. The two interns and myself went downstairs and grabbed a relaxing lunch. While we were in line, they asked me about my outfit.

They told me I looked like a Wall Street Executive (which was definitely a compliment) and nothing like a fashion intern. I then stared at Cailyn and Oli and realized that Cailyn was wearing high-waisted pants and a crop top, covered by a knit wrap and wedges. The other one was wearing a fitted tank top tucked in to her high-waisted bright pencil skirt, high wedges and was dripping in accessories. Both of them looked like they went to have their hair and makeup done earlier that morning. In that moment I realized that just like in the business world, I was supposed to ‘dress the part,’ only this ‘part’ meant I had to be trendy and chic and up-to-date at all times. The trends I was writing about had to be on my body. Even though I worked at a desk all day, I was expected to be prepared to go to an event or premiere, attend an interview or even be ready to look ‘the part’ if a celebrity came in for an interview at the office. I had to be the articles I was writing about and believe in the thoughts or trends that I was publishing to the world. I was released from work at 6 pm on the first day, ten hours after my initial arrival.

The next day I got off the subway promptly at 8:00 am, coffee in hand. I wore palazzo pants, a bright crop top and a summer sweater. My hair was in a messy bun on top of my head and nude wedges were on my feet. I no longer brought my brief case, but rather I sported a more appropriate bag as I walked through the city, with my oversized sunglasses on and headphones in my ears. In just one day, I morphed into exactly those girls that judged me on my walk in, and I was ready to write articles and literally wear my stories, being ‘the part.’ At 3:00 pm, my boss invited me to report at my first event that night, she had put my name on the list. I had to work until 5:00 pm and head straight to the event, leaving no time to eat dinner and no time to change—no wonder they expected me to look the part. This was the moment I realized that the nonstop pace of the fashion industry, and it was only day two.

An average of seven stories a day, written and published, was a consistent occurrence for the duration of the entire internship. I showed up each morning at the same time and left ten hours later, leaving the possibility to attend an event for the remainder of the day. There was never a moment when I had nothing to do, and they knew when I took a lunch break longer than an hour. If I was asked to run an errand and pick up dresses, I had to complete the task quickly, and by the end of the second week, I learned to always bring sneakers to wear on these runs instead of wedges.

I went from working at a financial company where things were calm, voices were low, and televisions were muted with stock numbers running across the screens, to a complete animal house, by comparison. The fashion industry is constantly changing—designers creating new pieces for their collections, celebrities stepping out in couture garments, and ultimately, stores selling and buyers distributing new lines and clothes to stores all over the world to be distributed



**Figure 3.** This graph is provided by the US Government ([www.economagic.com](http://www.economagic.com)).

and put into the consumers closets. According to Figure 3, Americans spent an average of \$15,017,000,000.00 each month on clothes in 2013. As with any type of commerce, there will

be periods of dramatic growth and interludes of a dry market, however on average, the consumption of clothing seems to be a constant trend across the United States at all points in the year, classifying it as a necessity. With the constant supply and demand for clothes, there is always a need for members of the fashion team to be designing, styling, and writing about fashion.

The constant obligation to write and publish articles was clear throughout my interview. The media platform, or blog, that is the first to post the latest fashion updates – consisting of who is wearing what featured articles of clothing from specific collections –receives the most traffic, and ultimately assumes the most hits and popularity. Readers from all over the country, and the world, are reading these blogs to better inform themselves of the current fashions and what celebrities are wearing. This allows them to create their own opinions and establish personal views of the trend. When posting about fashion, it was imperative to be the first to capture the moment and explain the style because if you did, not only were you first, but you were also cited for your knowledge by all other competing blogs and articles that followed the time of when your post was published, giving the cite tons of traffic and publicity.

On July 22, 2013, approximately one month into my internship in New York City, I was working at my other part-time job. There, I worked doing secretarial tasks for a financial company, the complete antithesis of my duties at my fashion internship. Everyone was dressed in business casual attire and the work environment was calm and collected. The employees sat at their respective cubicles performing daily duties or discussing weekly projects and goals. This day was identical to every other in the business world of finances and employee benefits. My phone lit up on my desk with a call from the Fashion Director, Karina. With slight panic behind her voice, she told me that there was only one other fashion intern in the office that day, Cailyn.

She told me that the Royal Baby was expected to be due at any moment and that I needed to get to the office as fast as possible. In the background, it was clear that all the writers and Public Relations agents were in some sort of a frenzied panic.

As I hung up the phone, my workspace returned to silence. The contrast between the environments of a fashion industry office and that of a financial company was more than noticeable. I told my boss at the financial company about the situation I ran from 36<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> to 45<sup>th</sup> and Broadway as fast as I possibly could. When I got there, I was bombarded with steps and tasks to complete in order to properly prepare for the birth of the new royal baby, first child of Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge, Kate Middleton. Hours before the birth of the baby, I was told to write the article as if all the information was already known, such as the name, sex, time of birth, and what the baby was “wearing” at their first reveal. I had to do this process for the Duchess and for the Prince. This way, the company was prepared to get the information out to the public as fast as possible. After the birth of Prince George, we were so prepared that at the exact moment that he came into the world, our sources informed us, and we were able to release the details and information to the public first.

In minutes, the traffic of the site, and the count of unique visitors, increased five fold and the dress that the Duchess, the shirt that William, and the blanket that baby George were wearing sold out within hours and were on backorder for up to six weeks. There are two imperative things to recognize with this example. The first is the importance of being precise and efficient to write the stories and deliver them to fashion hungry readers. It is self-evident that there is a demand for fashion updates and knowledge from consumers and readers; therefore there is a need for people to constantly produce this information. This offers supporting evidence to how media influences the decisions of the consumer, in particular, the fashion guru or conscious

people. Regardless if these readers were looking for the article or stumbled upon it, the article was still read, dissected, and interpreted by the consumer and ultimately had some sort of influence on their future purchases, conversations, and lifestyles. It is vital to recognize that these articles and media attention, whether they are good or bad reviews, offer some sort of affirmation that a style is present in society and/or accepted by the public.

The second significant factor about “the day Prince George was born” is the amount of consumers, globally, that are so heavily influenced by the clothing choices of celebrities and higher tiers. The simple notion that she was wearing a particular blue polka dotted dress, as did Princess Dianna when she revealed Prince William to the world, was essential to new mothers and gift givers around the world. Her maternity dress became a statement piece for all new moms within a matter of seconds. Even the blanket that Prince George was wrapped in was sold out in a matter of hours. This causes the need to reconsider the question of why consumers find this to be an essential factor when it comes down to their decisions for clothing purchases. This was when I first recognized the tiers of fashion and the trickle-down theory in the field.

I realized that the trend began with the most influential celebrities that consumers looked up to; People that, good or bad, have the power to make a difference. These are the people that the lower tiers want to read about, because they look up to them and aspire to look like them. Then, writers, like myself, are employed by the demand of the consumers to report on what they are doing and wearing. This way, lower tiers of people have the ability to look like their idols, dress like them and know what is constantly going on in his or her life. This sort of connection creates a sort of bond between the levels of fashion and different classes of consumers, as was described in my literature review. The tiers of fashion develop the trickle-down theory and allow the consumer the power to recreate the expensive, higher-tier fashions that they had previously



“seen” (through the media reports) on the celebrity. There is an obvious link between the celebrities wearing specific clothes and the need for the consumer to buy them. These purchases ultimately transform the look into a trend.

The celebrities are usually the ones to wear the high end clothes first because they have the opportunity based on their means, income, and influence—supporting the idea of the “trickle-down” theory— however, the middle tiers, the consumers that can individualize this trend and adapt it as an affordable option for the average person, are the ones that “create” the trend. For example, the “crop top” trend – first worn by current top celebrities like Rihanna, Selena Gomez, and Kim Kardashian. The designers give these clothes to the celebrities at a discount or as a “gift,” that way he or she can promote the clothes simply by having the celebrity wear them in the street. The paparazzi catch pictures of these influential celebrities wearing the designer outfit and then people like Karina publish it in major magazines and blogs. After viewers read the story, the look takes off and the average buyer for lower-tier stores, which are affordable to the general public, recreate the garment and sell it to the stores where the item can become a “trend,” which is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as: a general direction in which something is developing or changing. In this case, a trend is a general direction in which the fashion industry, for the current season, is developing or changing; the trend shows how the industry is progressing and changing. This change or development could be extremely subtle, a complete contrast in anything the world has seen before, or it could be a repeat of past trends and looks that are subtly different and more modern than the one it is mimicking.

These tiers of fashion offer divisions between classes of people and exact styles of the trend, however they establish a link between the celebrity and the average consumer. The middle-class consumer develops a level of status as she creates a wardrobe similar to those that appear in

celebrity magazines, fashion blogs, et cetera. This concept of status, and maintaining the highest rank as possible, perpetuates the constant need to update a personal wardrobe, buy a new dress, or recycle old clothes to buy new ones. The desire to obtain social status within a group is pressured and prolonged by peer influence. Social status establishes peer groups and creates or develops a social culture that a person surrounds himself or herself with daily. From an anthropological perspective, it is imperative to view those that submit to the pressures of their peers and celebrity influence in regards to the development of their fashion presence as the way of traditional culture as I have experienced and noticed in my fieldwork and from my ethnographic interviews.

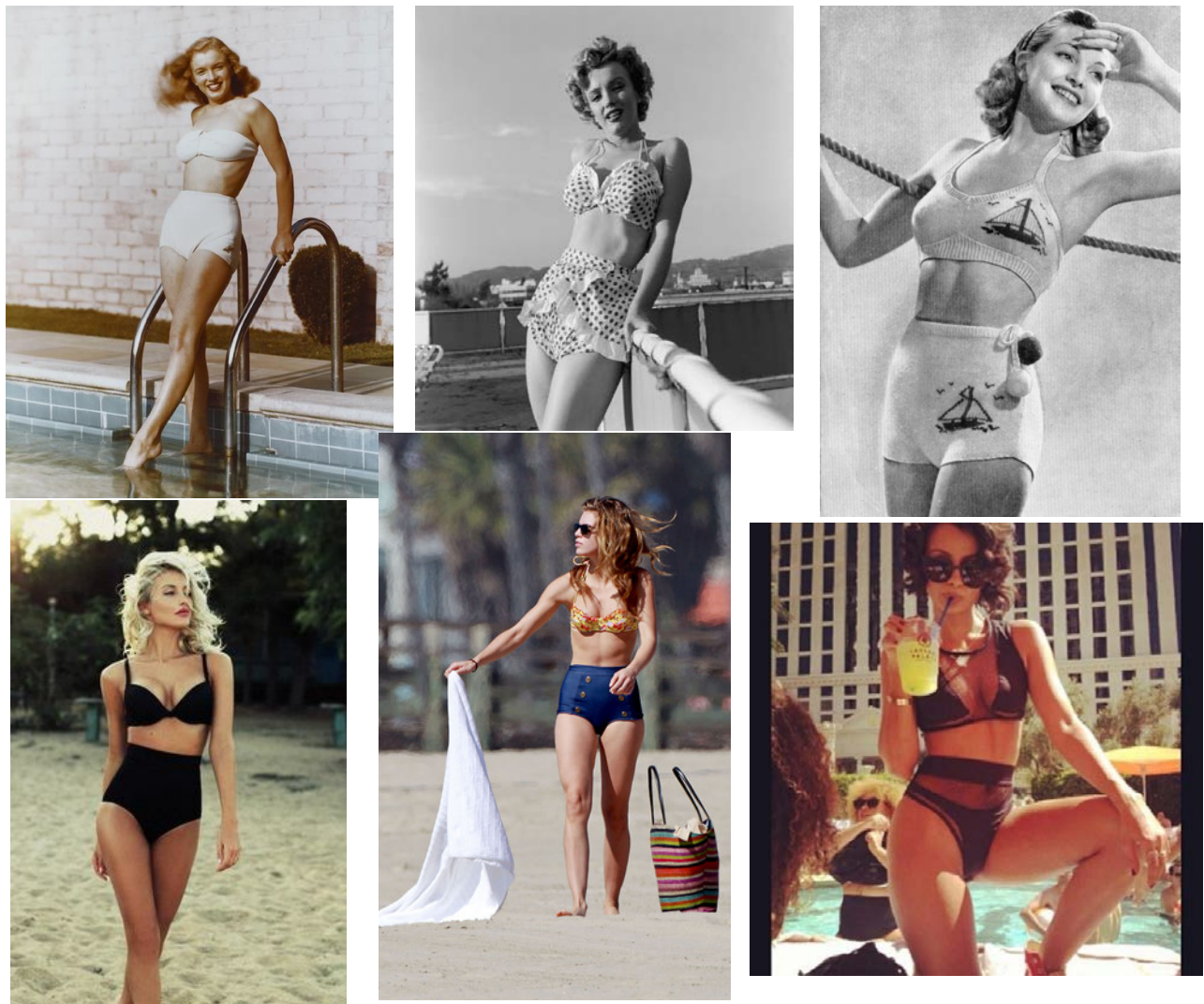
The majority of the stories I was asked to write were based off what celebrities were wearing, “Trend to Try” or “Get the Look,” and the most common trends at a given moment. Each of these types of articles offers an integral way of demonstrating how the celebrities influence the thoughts of the consumers and ultimately give the trend a push-start. “Trend to Try” articles feature a celebrity wearing some sort of statement piece that not many people are wearing. For example, at the beginning of summer 2013, I wrote a “Trend to Try” article about tight crop tops. These shirts were only featured on top celebrities like Rihanna and Miley Cyrus, and rarely seen on the average girl walking down the street. My job was to describe the “Trend” and then explain to the reader how they could recreate this look at an affordable price. Although it was not the same exact shirt, it was offered as an option to consumers to recreate the same appearance that their celebrities were wearing, ultimately establishing a link to celebrity lifestyles.

The “Get the Look” articles were a little different in regards to what items I featured, but they still examined the looks of celebrities. This time, the articles described how consumers

could buy the exact wardrobe of a given celebrity when she was spotted wearing affordable (lower-tier) clothing. Not only did these articles describe how a common fashionista could find herself walking down the street in the very same dress that Taylor Swift wore to the grocery store, but also it provided a feeling of equality to the reader. They are the ability to be put in a position where they had the power to buy clothes in the exact same tier that top celebrities purchased. One example of this would be Sam Edelman *GiGi* sandals. These sandals are roughly \$USD 45.00 and have been seen on celebrities like Victoria's Secret Angel, Alessandra Ambrosio, and Hilary Duff. These two iconic celebrities were wearing affordable footwear, making them desirable for the tiers and classes lower than them. The flip-flop is a high quality leather sandal, and it is sold at an affordable price. This shoe offers an opportunity for the consumer to recreate the exact look of a celebrity. These examples demonstrate how the trend can perpetuate and recreate itself by celebrities and higher tiers wearing it. By a higher tier wearing a look, it creates a bridge between the common person and a celebrity, thus forcing consumers to want to wear that shoe, or skirt, dress, etc.

The articles that I wrote about the latest trends were based on the research that I conducted regarding fashion forecasting. I was to browse magazines, sites, and celebrity *Instagram* accounts in order to contrive a "roundup" of a popular look or common theme. There was one instance when three different celebrities were caught wearing a similar black, leather crop top. I then also noted that what they were wearing for bottoms and on their feet. Through noticing these patterns and common themes, I was to forecast and project a possible trend for the present or near future, compile pictures, and tell readers how to wear these outfits. Other times, I had to assemble roundups for maxi dresses, headbands, and high-waisted bathing suits.

High-waisted bathing suits were an interesting topic because I was able to notice the fashion cycle repeating itself. In the 1960s, high-waisted bathing suit bottoms complimented by a strappy top were iconic of the fashion scene, as they were spotted on celebrities like Marilyn Monroe. About 50 years later, the trend is recycling and finding its way back into the fashion market. This past summer, Taylor Swift, a famous twenty-five year old singer was spotted sporting the same trend.



**Figure 4.** The top row shows pictures taken in the 1960s of women in bathing suits. The trend was high waisted bottoms, a look that dissipated over time. The bottom row of photos shows pictures taken in 2013. We can see that the trend has recycled itself and is present again. *All photos are compliments of Google.*

This gives substantial supporting evidence to the information that was found in my literature review—Trends repeat themselves over time. As Daniel Musto mentioned this look in his interview as we discussed *Teen Beach Movie* and the bathing suit styles featured in the film that takes place in the 1960s.

“The best body for the high-waisted bikini would be someone that is a little curvier. It looks best on a girl with a little bit of hip because back in the 60s when that style started, the curvy girl was in, and it’s definitely coming back and I’m happy about that. It looks great to cover up after swimming with a wrap or something that can just wrap around the waist and compliment the high waist look, which is fully making a comeback” (Daniel Musto Interview).

However, what the authors in my literature forget to mention is how they are subtly changed and altered over time, that way they designers can call it “reinventing the past” or “redoing vintage.” As you can see in Figure 4, the style has subtly changed since the 1960s. “I worked to add a modern touch and take inspiration from the past but altering things slightly – For example, I put waistlines where they are currently in 2013, especially on men’s pants” (Daniel Musto Interview). Clearly, any girl from 2013 that would be wearing the bathing suits on the top row in 1962 would not be trending the same style featured on the bottom row because of the age difference. Although the trend repeats itself, there is always some aspect of modern fashion that alters the way it looked originally.

It can be easily observed that the overall looks are similar, however the bottom row, featuring bathing suits of 2013, are clearly modernized and altered. The bikini tops are different because they feature a deeper, plunging neck and occasional a mis-matched top. The bottoms have transformed into less of a boy/short look and into more of a feminized look. The waistline of the bathing suit has risen back up to the traditional “vintage” look of the 1940s (above the naval), however the leg/thigh areas have become more revealing, fitting in with the bikini bottom styles of previous seasons. The transition from the high-waisted bikini bottoms from the 1960s

to the 2013 imitation of this look was subtle and slow, however it clearly offers evidence to repeating cycles and trend repetition from designers. There was a need for this look to be recycled and reentered into the market at this particular time in swimwear fashion. It may have been because the low-rise look that had been popular for a many decades was getting to get old and boring for designers or because some media or cultural event had decided that it was necessary for this look to be popular; possibly, as Daniel Musto mentioned, the ‘curvy girl’ is coming back into style and this style looks better on her. Whatever the reason, the trend recycled itself because of some influence and need by the culture.

This also supports the argument that celebrities are the ones who are capable of setting the trend because these people are photographed and posted in magazines and on blog websites, where readers can view the new styles and ultimately imitate them. This imitation endorses the idea that common consumers aspire to establish a link to celebrities in order to gain a higher level of status within their social groups. While last seasons’ bathing suits are still acceptable, a new trend insinuates that the wearer has gone shopping recently and has a sense of individuality, which empowers her to dress like people of a high status; a new bathing suit of the current season and trend creates an illusion that this person has stepped outside of a comfort zone of what everyone else is doing and ultimately accepted a new trend (a sense of fashion-forwardness). It is the moment in which everyone begins to wear the new trend—when the trend trickles-down to the stores that offer the same style for a lower price—that the trend change and the cycle is restarted. When the trend is new, it is marked as more desirable and harder to obtain. Once every common consumer can purchase the garment, then the item is no longer “trendy” and new, but rather it becomes the norm and a new “trend” is created for the consumer.

It is safe to presume that the high-waisted bathing suit bottom is an up-and-coming trend for the Women's 2014 summer lines, since fashion, is "designed almost a year in advance. [Companies start] researching and shopping for Pre-Fall 2014 in August 2013. The buyers will see the [product] in December 2013, and the shoes will hit stores in June 2014," (Stephanie Interview). After the lengthy (almost one year) process of designing, marketing, and buying, the look (in this case the high-waisted bikini bottom) becomes more attainable and acceptable to be worn by people other than celebrities. This style will become less desirable and ultimately fade out with the introduction of a different style bikini bottom as the culture calls for it. This demonstrates the perpetuating cycle of changing hemline lengths, waistlines, and sleeve cuts and having the consumer individualize said look. Within the fashion world, the designers, buyers, and marketers are constantly trying to forecast the next move of trends and choose the correct projection as to which direction celebrities and stylists will want to dress in next. These choices give the inevitable push to the next season of trends and fashion styles.

Fashion in NYC functions in the same way it would in Europe or other parts of the United States. The tiers I have described work to deduce the fashions in way that can create an affordable alternatives for other buyers. As I have explained, this creates a link between the consumer and the celebrities or famous people that brought the trend to fruition. The idea that New York City offers some sort of breeding ground for fashionistas and people that are choose to wear clothes to their own prerogative is nothing new. My attendance at the Mercedes Benz New York City Fashion Week in February of 2014 gave clarity to this query.

### ***New York City Fashion Week 2014***

Fashion Week is an event that takes place all over the world at different times each year. Famous celebrities, top models, and high-end designers make an appearance to witness the debut

of the latest trends. Designers work hard to create a plethora of looks and styles that will catch the attention of the attendees watching the show and show off the new wardrobes approximately two seasons ahead of the time that the collection will enter stores. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to attend New York Fashion Week at Lincoln Center and witness the Custo Barcelona fashion line for Fall 2014.

There were two security guards at the door. Behind them was a black carpet with neon white lights and a commotion of casually chic people attending different shows. I walked up to him and showed him my e-ticket, gaining me access to the event. I arrived early, as I was able to go backstage before the show commenced to see my Karina, who was conducting interviews. I walked in and was directed to the cocktail counter. Hesitant at first to order a cocktail at 2pm in the afternoon, I looked around the room and followed suit, everyone had a glass of Prosecco in their hands, so ordered myself a glass as I waited for the show. I sat amongst poker-faced attendees, frantically taking notes and watching shows that were on the plasma screens. There were acrobats and dancers at some of the runways, and black wig-covered models at others. Each show on slew of televisions was unique and different in its own way, contributing a taste of something different to the fashion world.

I quietly admired the spotless black carpet, the organization, and the class of the event as a whole. It was truly remarkable to see an event of such magnitude being executed to that level of perfection. A half-hour before the event I decided it was time for me to head backstage and find Karina. I showed the women at the next security clearance my I.D. from my internship and my ticket and explained to her the situation, and with confidence she let me right through, and directed me to where I should go. I opened the door and knew that I only had about fifteen minutes before I had to be back outside the show to get in line to enter. I quickly moved across



the plastic protected runway, surrounded by seats of black carpet lining either side—it was literally a dream come true. I hustled around the sides of the model entrance and walked down a maze of hallways. Finally, I turned the corner and opened a door to find Karina, hectically taking notes and interviewing the models, who were being pampered and catered to by stylists or makeup artists, whom were perfecting every one of their limbs. She gave me a quick glance to acknowledge my arrival, but she was definitely preoccupied, so I knew I was on my own.

I wandered in and out of the stylist chairs, observing the models that were having finishing touches done to their hair, face, and nails. They were all wrapped in robes, ready to get dressed in their first outfits as soon as they were done getting pampered. Along the walls lined racks of clothes, perfectly hung and organized, with names of models, sizes, emergency-situation clothes, placed perfectly above the shoes that would go with that look. There were people running around with headsets, able to talk quietly enough as to not interrupt the other conversations going on in the room—and there were many. The room sounded like white radio static with the amount of voices and frequencies going on in such a confined space, complimented by the white lights reflecting off of the mirrors.

As I exited the room, the door shut behind me and it was silence again, an eerie silence. There was so much chaos going on about ten feet from me, yet there was stillness in the show room. I am not sure why but it was at this moment when I realized how ‘official’ the experience was, and how authentic the fifteen minutes I just spent backstage at New York Fashion Show was. Humbled, I headed back to the entrance and got in line to enter the show. People in the fashion world were animals—there was pushing and shoving in order for people to get to the front of the line. At the time I did not realize why people were so eager to push there way up to the front. Each person had assigned seating; I was A-4-10. A calm gentleman with a headset,

wearing a tuxedo, guided us to the doors and explained that he would be opening them in a few seconds and advised us to calmly enter and take our seats. The use of the adverb, calmly, was quickly forgotten as these women and men entered the room in a stampede. I obviously was not prepared for this complete transition of ambiance, however I held my ground and made it to my seat. It had a sign with the company name, *Celebritylife.com*, reserved on it, with a matching one reserved next to me, assuming for my boss.

Three random women from London casually sat down in the reserved seat (single seat) next to mine. Finally, I understood why the herd of fashion fanatics was sprinting through the door not too long before. There were no rules when it came to the seating assignments, as long as you got through the doors, you were able to squeeze your way into any available seat. It is clear that in an extremely planned and precise world, there are still moments of chaos, disorganization, and abrasive dialogues. I sat in my seat and attempted to make conversation with these women, who were ultimately pushing me off of the bench we were now forced to share. I mentioned my excitement for the show to begin, my nerves, and the amazing experience it was to be here. They looked at me with disinterested faces and were not impressed by my less than novice knowledge and experience in the fashion field. These women were not at the show to make friends. They were there for business, and strictly business. Their role was not to be pleasing or amicable, but rather to make me feel inferior as we watched the show, touching shoulders.

The fashion world brings a great challenge of emotional strength and indifference to the opinions of others through a sentiment of detachment. There was no small talk between the surrounding attendees and myself. The only discussion we engaged in regarded the fashion show, the featured looks worn by the models, and for me to politely lower my camera (iPhone), as it was blocking her view. People took their seats and the lights dimmed. Loud music

commenced, complimented by a strong bass that shook my seat. Neon pink lights flashed from backstage and the photographers at the end of the runway took their positions, propped up their equipment in anticipation for the show to begin. With the electronica music continuing to pulse in the background, the spotlights turned on and the first model turned the corner.

Model after model strutted down the runway, posed at the end for the photographers to snap all angles, turned around and walked back. They were trained to walk the same and were all wearing wigs with bangs, or fringe, cut in the same style. There were four men in the fashion show, each walking similarly to the ladies, with a bit more of an attitude and a bit less sway in their hips. They were supposed to look manly and intimidating in comparison with the dainty female models. The models marched up and down the runway in specifically coordinated outfits that were chosen months in advance. In contrast to what you would see in a store, the looks were mismatched, almost thrown together in order to appear as an art form. There were brown leathers mixed with black suedes complimented by silver, metallic accents. There were pink neon hats that functioned as compliments to orange and white fur, floor-length coats. The looks were completely “catwalk chic.” They were far more eccentric than anything that would be featured in a store, but I believe that that is precisely the purpose.

After observing the catwalk first hand, it was clear that this was the top tier of fashion. This is where the over-exaggerated look started. As the metallic, neon, and fur trends work their way down to a more common market, their striking looks become diluted and more wearable for the common consumer. For example, the Custo Barcelona fashion show featured a lot of orange—orange shoes, hats, fur, tops, and jackets. The orange pieces were scattered and extremely present, almost to the point that they were obnoxious and overwhelming. As Custo releases this clothing collection to the public, and as buyers purchase the products and

merchandisers sell them in stores, the amount of orange noticeable to the eye will not be as drastic as it was in the show. The metallic pants will become metallic trim or scarves (something more subtle). The designers will alter these catwalk looks in order to make them more appealing for the average celebrity walking down the street. From there, the trend will thin itself even more as normal consumers desire the look and buy similar pieces. As I have explained, the catwalk works to introduce the trend to the world. At this stage, it is usually extravagant, over-the-top, and completely glamorous.



**Figure 5.** These are photos that were taken by myself at the Custo Barcelona fashion show in February of 2014.

As the fashion show concluded, the designer came out after the last model, looking like he just ran a 10K marathon and waved to the crowd. All of the audience in attendance applauded his appearance as a sign of gratitude for his creations, ideas, and time. This was exactly 22 minutes since the first sound of the electronica music flooded the room. Years of trend forecasting, creation, design, approval and patience were put in place for a 22-minute catwalk; all to get the attention of celebrities, buyers, designers and magazine editors.

With the admiration and approval of these people, the designers' ideas and styles will make it in the fashion world. As soon as Custo Dalmau, creator and designer of Custo Barcelona, left the runway, the lights turned on and the chaos reignited. People stood up and hustled to the next show, or they maneuvered themselves to go speak with someone they spotted on the other side. The whole experience was a business transaction and a networking opportunity in an attempt to climb the social ladder and reach success.

While my internship educated me with the knowledge of promoting the trends and celebrity gossip on clothing choice, New York Fashion Week allowed me to witness the debut of the trends and the business aspect of fashion. Although the two sides are very much so related, they each operate as their own individual machine, contrived of different parts and duties that allow the fashion world—in regards to the perpetual cycle of trends coming in and out of style—to run smoothly. The moment that the Custo Barcelona fashion show began, the fashion world was changed because new trends and ideas entered the industry; the same concept goes for any fashion show in any part of the world, making each moment of each show truly remarkable and influential.

## *Conclusion*

In this section I have discussed the fashion world and how it functions in New York City. Through my internship experience and involvement in New York Fashion Week, I was able to obtain adequate ethnographic observations and information to speculate valid conclusions. Also, after living in New York City for three months, I was able to observe the patterns and trends that were worn by native New Yorkers, locals, and visitors. I can justly conclude that everything people wear on the street, or choose to buy in a store, is with intention, conviction and purpose. People choose to buy clothing, consciously or not, in order to find a way to express themselves and their true identities to the world. A person's profession and their friend group may cause exterior views of whom a person truly is to be altered or judged. However, when a person has a choice of what they can wear, they have the ability to appropriately convey who they are to the world.

There is something unique about New York City and the fashion rules that hone the personalities and wardrobes of its inhabitants. This subtle distinction of atmosphere and ambiance is different than anywhere I have visited in the world. I believe that this is in large part because New York City was the central hub for all incoming immigrants. With the large migrant population and ethnic diversity, New York City has presented itself as a melting pot for anyone to visit or move to. There are so many different types of people living there, leaving no room for judgment. Everyone is diverse and has created their own identity, ultimately moving to New York City for a reason—whether it is to pursue a specific career, go to school, or be surrounded by a colorful, metropolitan population, each citizen has been able to go to New York and be accepted for his or her personal choices, preference, ideas and identity. With so many different

opinions and cultural backgrounds, some sort of a level playing field is created and people that live in the city are free to just be who they are.

Whether it is Fashion Week or a casual afternoon walking around Soho or the West Village in New York City, people wear clothes that make them feel alive. The simple concept of freedom in clothing choice and the ability to wake up in the morning and convey who you feel you are, on that particular day, to the world is a recognized right in New York City. Youth and students especially seem to have some sort of ability to create outfits at a level between the catwalk tier and the regular consumer tier. In this grey area, the clothes are not directly off the runway, and definitely do not cost as much money, yet they have an uncanny resemblance to the mix-matched, trendy, “I worked hard on this outfit” look that was evident at Fashion Week. New York City takes the simple notion of clothes – a necessity of what is considered “civilized, contemporary society”— and creates a platform for unique self-expression and judgment free creativity.

With the experience of my internship, I was able to witness the fast-paced scene of the fashion industry and the importance of precision, accuracy and attention to detail. It was imperative to publish the stories before other bloggers or magazines in order to receive the most traffic, and to be sure the facts were correct. The industry leaves no time for hurt feelings or emotions and the concept of tardiness is completely deplorable and intolerable. The backstage scene at Custo Barcelona’s Fashion Show during New York City Fashion Week was hectic, chaotic, and, what appeared to be, disorganized.

The ‘behind-the-scenes’ aspect of the fashion world is completely unglamorous, yet what is portrayed to the public is a very different image. Just as the models came out to the runway in pristine outfits and a perfected ‘strut,’ the magazines print celebrities in the designer clothes

perfectly, however the work behind publishing those magazines, or designing the clothes constitutes almost thankless, and difficult, labor. However, this is precisely how fashion is supposed to work. Clothes are used to convey an identity of a person and hide any imperfections or struggles they may be enduring at a certain time. The trendy clothes and the particular choices people make in their wardrobe are used to give people the ability to communicate his or her true intentions, ambitions and values, rather than reveal ones whole life story of adversity or success. I can conclude that the purpose of fashion, other than as a perpetuating consumer good, is to create a way for individuals to assume one's appropriate identity at a given time. New York City offers a perfect environment, functioning as a melting pot of different classes, nationalities, fashion tiers, social groups, and identities, in order to serve this purpose. Other places or subcultures have the ability to subvert these ideas based on the environment they create for their inhabitants.



#### ***Chapter 4. Union College: Uniformity & the Liberal Arts Expectation of Fashion***

The interviews that I conducted at my internship were with people that are currently working in the fashion, design, or styling industry, including myself, provided a common theme throughout—each stated that their love for fashion began at a very young age and that he or she was able to notice trends, patterns, or certain things that caught their eye about the industry. There was never a situation where someone decided they wanted to enter the industry; uniformly, a person's interest and acknowledgement of fashion begins at a very young age. People that are trendsetters will stick out from the crowd for his or her entire life. At Union College, students are subconsciously convinced to blend in and wear a similar type of clothing in order to avoid social isolation and a lack of acceptance from their social group.

In anthropology, it is self evident that interpretations of cultures must be unbiased and one must come to understand a given culture by learning the reasons behind action and tradition from the perspective of the given location. Regarding fashion, Union College has a specific culture that distinguishes itself from the usual trends and findings in other areas. With ethnographic observation and a random survey of Union College female students, the data has presented a clear fashion trend and stigma within the social bubble of the college campus. When I entered as a freshman, my personal style was completely different than it is today, as a graduating senior. A short four years after my arrival on this small, private Liberal Arts campus, my fashion sense and appreciation for self-expression and identity through clothing choice has completely transformed. This observation begs the question— What makes Union College a subculture of the fashion and how does the Union College female student closet compare to any other private Liberal Arts student's closet? Does Union College subvert the fashion culture of New York City and if so, why?

At the end of my junior year, I found myself walking across campus and realizing that I was having difficulty differentiating which girls belonged to which grade; all of the girls on campus were clothed from head to toe in the same fashion. The social scene of Union College creates a small bubble that controls and manipulates the campus community. Because the college population is so small and the majority of students are upper-middle class, it is easy to stand out and a lot easier to just blend in with the rest of the student body. By wearing the same clothes, of the same label, the female students have the ability to blend in, fit in, and maintain a level of social status. By conforming, the females on campus are able to conserve their friend group because they are at the same 'social level,' however; they are not 'out-dressing' the other members of the group. Since the student population and the actual size of the college property is so small, each social group blends in and mixes with the other, therefore the trend group and social tier envelops the entire female student population. When a member steps outside the socially accepted group attire, they are immediately notified and subtly, or not, advised to dress within the parameters of the accepted fashion scope.

An example of this happened to me at Union College on Friday, February 7, 2014. My car was packed and my friend, Nicki, and I were ready to start our road trip to New York City for a weekend of good food, shopping, and fashion week. We were dressed in our best, trendiest clothes that we could find in our closet. I was wearing overalls that were unbuttoned and hanging around my waist, an oversized-sweater, combat boots and a black beanie. Nicki was wearing spiked red wedge-sneakers, camouflage jeans, a white t-shirt and a red scarf. Our faces were perfectly painted with makeup and we did not think anything about it—the notion that we were going to New York City, for fashion week, and wearing the trendiest clothes we could find, was exactly what we were supposed to do, since New York, as I explained is such a melting pot

of diversity where all fashions are completely acceptable. Before we left, we decided to stop at the campus center to grab a coffee before we embarked on the three-hour drive to Manhattan.

As we entered the building, there were two tables of girls that were our closest friends. Their faces looked either as if they had seen a ghost, or as if we had just committed a murder; whatever we did, it was something ‘wrong’ and ‘bad.’ We had completely stepped outside of the socially acceptable fashion spectrum, and we were about to be punished for it. Subconsciously, the girls that were sitting there watching us walk by were impressed with our choices, and subtly gave credit to our individuality and fashion creativity. If they really did not care about our clothes, or if they fit in the average scope of what students wear on campus, the women would not have felt the need to say anything about our outfits. However, the majority of the comments that were made were things such as “Oh! Where are you two going?” or “Are you guys now a member of a rap/hip hop group?” or “Who are you trying to impress?” The comments continued, and with our fashion knowledge in the back of our heads, we just laughed and nodded our heads, agreeing with them that we were too dressed up for Union College. Interestingly, our agreement eased their concerns that we were trying to ‘out-dress’ them.

By rejecting the other, the norms of society can be reinforced. As the girls tried to cast us into the “unacceptable style” category in order to reinforce their social class and the permitted parameters, all Nicki and I had to do was agree that we were outside of the boundaries and verify that we looked different, and their emotions were settled. We were instantly accepted and the attacks through passive-aggressive comments subsided. Evidently, fashion at Union College is implemented as an institution to maintain class order and structure of friend groups, generating equality among all members. There are many opportunities for the diverse array of Union College students to wear whatever they choose to wear, however the social pressure and the

constant need for equality among female peers creates a road block for all the stylish souls on campus. These are all traits I have noticed through my time spent as a college student, however most female students would not publically agree with what I am saying; they would never admit to the concept of ‘social fashion parameters’ or attacking a style in order to prevent it from becoming popular, or forcing women to remain within a particular class or tier of fashion.

Based solely on observations, Union College’s fashion is similar but not identical to the current mainstream trends that one could find in New York City. Based on an article written by a southern Liberal Arts student, “[Liberal Arts students] like conformity. We value embroidered logos, pastel hues, and rugby stripes. [...] The look we aspire to won’t be found anywhere in *Vogue* or *Harper’s BAZAAR*” (McKinney 2011). This article discusses the goals and intentions of female Liberal Arts student wardrobes and what people see to be the ‘norm.’ I am not the only one to recognize this separate style of college students, as McKinney mentioned it in her article. Her comments coincide succinctly with the data I received from my research. She quotes:

“When weather permits (as it often does in the South), sundresses are the best option—in florals, stripes, polka dots, or solids, and never too short, tight, or revealing. You wouldn’t want to look like a state schoolgirl, would you? Anything from Lilly Pulitzer is always acceptable; Gap, Banana Republic, and J. Crew can be cheaper options. In the colder months, leggings, UGG boots, and North Face jackets are wardrobe necessities, with peacoats at the ready for more formal occasions. Jeans are okay when paired with a polo or an oxford, and remember your logo rules. A good Southern Liberal Arts student goes to the gym every day—for workouts, wear Nike athletic shorts (also known as ‘norts’) and a t-shirt from a social event that shows your popularity. [...] Rainbow flip-flops, boat shoes, and even TOMs (for our more environmentally friendly peers) are acceptable footwear” (McKinney 2011).

In fact, this fashion can be seen across the board at most small Liberal Arts colleges, such as Siena College, Cornell University, Bucknell University, Colby College, Skidmore College, Colgate University and Bates College. I have visited more than half of these colleges, as well as

some in the south, and each time I pack a bag to visit I always have no trouble blending in, fitting in, and looking like a regular student that attends that specific university. When walking the streets of New York City, it is easy to see people still wearing the Liberal Arts student trends, however, they are easily picked out of the crowd as a conformist student. McKinney expresses that this separate style of fashion eludes itself from the mainstream trends and ultimately creates a subculture of fashion, subverting the ‘norm’ of mainstream fashion. Not only are private Liberal Arts students, like those that attend Union College, expected to wear logos and high-end brands, but they are also expected to subvert the global designer trends that flourish throughout the world. They challenge the idea that there is one idea of “fashion” or “trends” that matter in the modern world, demonstrating that the subcultures of fashion also have their own micro-trends that fall under the macro-subject of fashion.

#### ***84 Maplecrest***

The trends that are prevalent at Liberal Arts colleges like Union College are comprised of a plethora of labels that somehow have come to dignify the stereotyped lifestyle of a 21<sup>st</sup> century college student. The trends and expected styles are so easily uniformed and identifiable by conformist patterns, colors, and overall themes like leather, pastels and brass jewelry. Twice a term, Union College hosts a pop-up retail company called 84 Maplecrest. The company is owned and operated under the direction of a woman from South Carolina out of her U-Haul sized truck. She travels from campus to campus on the east coast, making an appearance once or twice per semester. Her inventory consists of similar trends, brands, and logos that McKinney mentioned in her article.

The owner of 84 Maplecrest told me that she “continues to do this because it’s good money and the students can afford it, whether or not they’re paying with daddy’s money” (84

Maplecrest Interview). The clothing and accessories that are sold at this three day pop up sale are name brands like Free People, Patagonia, Frye, Hunter Boots, TOMs, Southern Tide, BB Dakota, Joes' Jeans, True Religion, Michael Kors, Jack Rogers, Marc Jacobs and Lily Pulitzer, among many others, both for men and women. These brands and logos are well known across campus and are seen as a sense of status among the students based on their exorbitant price points.

However, McKinney was exactly right when she said that these brands and looks would not be seen in *Vogue* or *Harper's BAZAAR*. As an employee for this company, I see many of the same students purchase clothes each time the sale arrives on campus, usually part of a sorority or a specific friend group. 84 Maplecrest offers name brand clothes, footwear and accessories for both men and women, specifically targeted at the standard wardrobe cataloged for a Liberal Arts student. The brands sold at 84 Maplecrest are equal or similar to the ones McKinney mentioned were representative this demographic. The owner mentioned that she was able to sell these clothes because "there is something about the atmosphere and environment at small colleges [...] where everyone is faced with constant pressure to appear a certain way" (84 Maplecrest Interview). The atmosphere at these Liberal Arts schools establishes a sentiment of group-imposed pressure in order to fit in and maintain social status. These articles of clothing sell because the students, who live away from their parents and have a sole priority of maintaining a level of social respect, inflict a level of desirability towards them.

It is through heavy study of 84 Maplecrest, and my aforementioned observations of everyone dressing the same on campus, that I was able to pick up and notice the trends of the Union College community. I first want to mention that 84 Maplecrest is equally successful in the sales of men and women's clothing and accessories at Union College. My research focuses on the fashion of women, however I think it is important to recognize the actions of the men at

Union College in this particular situation. As an employee, I was able to witness who purchased what items. I found it particularly interesting watching the men make their fashion transactions. Over 75%, roughly, of the men the purchased something from 84 Maplecrest purchased over \$100 worth of items. Although this is very easy to do because of the high-end brands offered at the store, some men walked away with shopping bags filled with goods costing over \$500. After the transaction was complete, the men would walk away and shove their shopping bag into their backpack, book bag, or any concealed bag that they had on them, so as to not be seen carrying their new merchandise. Regarding men and fashion at Union College, they were they the ones who spent the most money and the only ones who hid the fact that they purchased anything. Women are embarrassed by, or judged for, how much money they spend and are therefore inclined to show off their new merchandise.

This reveals something about the stigma of the fashion world and how men are subjected to hiding their true thoughts of the industry and rather appear to be disinterested in a heavily female influenced industry. Some of the top, most successful, designers in the world are men, however, as we drop our way down the fashion tiers and social levels, we see that Union College men have a feeling of dishonor against their role in fashion world. However, in New York City, men can be seen everywhere in this industry, from makeup artists, stylists, like Daniel Musto, designers like Michael Costello or Custo Dalmau, or even journalists or publicists. I can conclude this as evidence towards another example of Union College being subversive to the global fashion culture.

In the fall of my sophomore year (Fall 2011), I noticed people walking around campus wearing dark denim jeans, high leather boots, and some sort of neutral, quilted jacket. The look was accessorized with a full face of makeup, a Longchamp bag and a light scarf. The girls

walked in a herd of friends trending almost identical wardrobes. I followed behind them to the campus center noting their outfits and comparing them to mine—I realized I, too, was wearing dark denim, brown leather boots and a light scarf. I was wearing a light non-quilted jacket from Zara’s Fall 2011 Collection and chandelier earrings, instead of pearls or simple studs. I continued to compare myself and began to notice subtle differences between their outfits and mine. As we reached the campus center, I noticed the majority of young women there were wearing the same sort of get-up, with the quilted coats draped over the back of their chairs. There was clear evidence that a thorough thought process went into each female’s clothing choice.

### ***Ethnographic Survey Data – Union College Females***

I followed up on my observations and offered an anonymous multiple-choice survey to the females of Union College. I chose to receive data from only female students, because, as I explained earlier, I believe that there is a serious sentiment of embarrassment hindering the male involvement of fashion and for this reason, it is difficult to receive accurate information of the male opinion regarding the topic. Women and their passion for fashion are widely accepted in the industry, while men at Union College are expected to act a certain way. Their influenced actions, such as being expected to wear sweatpants and a sweatshirt to class (or the will be cast into the category of ‘the other’), and personalities would have jeopardized the accuracy of the survey results; therefore I chose to focus my data collection solely on the responses of female students. Also, I believe that I can better interpret the responses of a female because I am one, and have been in the same environment that they are discussing for four years. Eighty-three girls partook in my survey, and their participation offered validity and support to the claims above. My anonymous survey had ten questions, with the option to skip any that the person did not feel comfortable sharing, and also offered a space to leave responses or comments on each question.



The questions I asked are as follows, and I will refer to them by their number when referring to them and the results or comments.

1. Do you believe that fashion is a platform for self-expression?
2. How do you receive the majority of your current fashion knowledge?
3. What grade are you in at Union College?
4. Do you believe that Union College has a “fashion” culture?
5. What do you believe about the evolution of your personal wardrobe since you became a student at Union College... (multiple choice answers offered)?
6. Do you wear some article of clothing now that you never would have worn prior to Union College?
7. Do you believe that some members of campus have the capability to sway the student body into wearing certain clothes? If yes, who?
8. Is there a stigma of wearing certain clothes in order to “fit in” or “stay trendy” at Union?
9. It is \_\_\_\_\_ to maintain a level of individuality of my fashion style on campus (options offered).
10. Union has allowed me to \_\_\_\_\_ (multiple choice about change or maintain clothing choices offered).

I will begin by analyzing each question and the results I received from the Union College student body. The average time it took a participant to complete the survey was three minutes and 56 seconds. Two of the participants were freshmen, 20 were sophomores, 26 were juniors and 35 were seniors. Question one works to receive information on how female students see the concept of fashion as a whole, as a being, as an industry. The options to the question were “yes,” “no,” and “sometimes.” 76% of the participants responded yes, that fashion is a platform for self-expression. 0% of the participants said no and 24% of them said sometimes. One comment left on the question was “If I’m running late for class and just throw on some athletic leggings and a sweater, I wouldn’t call that expressing myself – I would call that ‘I slept in.’ Similarly, I wouldn’t want people assuming that that is me expressing myself. Putting effort into what you wear can definitely be a platform for creativity and self-expression, but not 100% of the time.” Her comment hits upon some major flaws in the widely assumed definition of what it means to be “fashionable.” She claims that putting on athletic leggings and a sweater is not expressing

herself, but rather classifies her choice of clothing as “I slept in.” “I slept in” is a look; it is a way of expressing to the world that you do not care what you look like today and ultimately are striving to accomplish a cozy, comfortable, casual look. Stephanie, the designer from chapter two, mentioned this situation exactly. Just because you wake up one day and choose that you are going to look casual because you just got out of bed does not change the fact that the articles of clothing you are putting on your body were purchased prior to that decision for a specific reason. By saying that you do not pay attention to fashion, ultimately you are saying your style is not caring about style.

Also, the young woman that left this comment also mentioned that she would hope that people do not think that that is how she is trying to convey any sort of self-expression. Unfortunately, any choice you make, in this case—clothing, is done in an act of self-expression. She is claiming that she woke up and put on athletic leggings and a sweater in order to express that she “slept in.” Therefore, her theory contradicts itself when she says that she hopes she is not attempting any means of self-expression, when in fact, she is trying to express that she woke up late and did not put as much effort into her wardrobe as she wished she had. I can conclude that since fashion always surrounds us each and every day, therefore this female student chose her outfit so people would know that she had just gotten out of bed, expressing herself in a subtly, yet clear, way.

In concordance with 84 Maplecrest and the comments made by the owner, another student commented on this question by saying, “It can also be a platform to showing off how much money you have.” Although this may have not been worded effectively, it demonstrates that fashion is seen as a method of exposing ones status, economically and socially. By buying expensive brands that everyone is wearing and knows are expensive, a girl can walk around with

a humble persona while still conveying an attitude in which her trends and costly lifestyle can be acknowledged by onlookers and close peers.

I included question two in order to see how people receive their fashion knowledge or influences. This is something I will elaborate on more in the next chapter, however I feel that it is important to acknowledge the results. 39% of the participants say that they receive their fashion information from social media sites such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Instagram*. 21% received their fashion inspiration from online or print magazines, and 40% (the majority) received their fashion influences from their peers. Since the people that took this survey are all Union College students, we can speculate that the majority of Union College females receive their fashion inspirations and influences from the peers that surround them while they are on campus.

Ultimately, we can conclude that Union College students feed off of the fashion statements and trends that their friends are wearing. This would have to create some sort of a race for equality, if not a competition between or within friend groups. Since only 21% receive their inspiration and trend ideas from print or online magazines, this could be the reason why Liberal Arts colleges, and Union College specifically, have different trends and fashion sense than mainstream, high-end fashion celebrities do. Since female students are surrounded by their peers more often than print magazines, they look to each other for the trend, rather than the celebrities that they do not see as they would if they live in New York City.

Question four was a broad question asking students if they feel as though there is a “fashion culture” on the Union College campus. 80% said yes and 20% said no. In my opinion, this question was a trick question because fashion is everywhere. No one can escape the culture of fashion and the traditions, cycles, and rituals it creates. Buying clothes and making them part

of your wardrobe, closet, or drawers makes them part of your identity. When you finally put them on your body, they become part of you and are the only barrier between your peers, the world, and your bare body. At all times, your individual identity is part of a bigger culture such as Union College or New York City, but you are also your own being, making choices everyday when you wake up and get dressed. Those are your decisions and they create the person you convey to the world.

Fifty percent of the participants said, they believe that their wardrobe has changed dramatically since their arrival on campus. The options were “You believe your wardrobe has changed dramatically,” “You believe there is no difference in your wardrobe since you arrived to Union College,” “You still wear 100% the same style you wore in high school.” The results matched my predictions—most of the girls would have a different wardrobe now than when they arrived on campus due to the constant pressures and influences. This would be the case for many different factors—maturity, knowledge, self-confidence and security, styles changing and evolving, independent living with out the guidance of parents, and in large part, the fact that there are new networks and friendships being formed each day. This data is also in agreement with the results gathered from question two, where do female students get the most of their fashion influence?—Answer: Their peers. When people are surrounded by other members in a social group, especially those that are in the same age bracket, tend to feed off of each other’s clothing choices and ultimately hope to dress similarly in order to create a sort of equilibrium. The people that are essentially ‘competing’ for social status in the same environment will want to dress to par with their surrounding peers.

One comment to this question said “I feel my wardrobe has changed as what’s ‘in style’ has changed, but not as a result of attending Union College.” I agree with this comment as

trends have the ability to change within one year. However, the fashion trends and typical style at Union College, and Liberal Arts colleges as a subculture are very much so different than the trends I can speculate that she is referring to. Since my freshman year, in 2010-2011, the senior girls were wearing jeans, tall leather boots, scarves, and Longchamp bags, the exact same trend that is present on campus today. However in the high-end fashion world that we can see in New York City, or Milan or Paris, has very much so evolved in four years. Celebrities have gone from wearing skin tight, ripped jeans to wearing baggy, boyfriend fit denim. At red carpet events like the Oscars, celebrities can be seen wearing mermaid cut dresses that feature eccentric patterns, strappy shoulders and revealing midriffs, rather than dresses with a sweetheart neckline in simple patterns that we saw were popular in 2010. It is clear that there are many differences that occur in the fashion world over four years, things such as ‘trending colors’—the hottest color of the season, ox blood red and orange for Fall 2013, Winter 2014 and Spring 2014. Runway fashion and celebrity style changes with the top tier. The environment at Union College creates a typical look that is expected of students attending classes, differentiating Union’s culture from that of New York City and runway fashion.

Question six discusses the ability for the social scene at Union College and how it holds the capacity to change a person’s wardrobe. Reflecting on the day that I walked behind the pack of similarly dressed girls in the fall of 2011, I realized the first article of clothing that I purchased, which began the snowball transformation of my closet—the long, puffy North Face jacket. In the fall of 2012, many of the junior and senior girls were walking around in knee-length, puffy black North Face jackets with hoods. For Christmas that year, I asked my mom for the coat. I unwrapped the box during the holidays and returned to Union for Winter 2013 with my new, “trendy” coat. Clearly this coat is not trendy in regards to the high-fashion designer

world, nor will it be featured in *Vanity Fair*, *Harper's BAZAAR* or *People StyleWatch*, however, it was a perfect look for Union College, a Liberal Arts school, and all the girls were wearing them. One of my friends a year younger me ordered hers online that day.

“Just saw five girls in a row wearing the same thing...same coat, snow boots, black leggings, and socks sticking out of the boots. Why Union?” This was a Facebook status posted by a female Union College senior on February 17, 2014. As I was scrolling through my news feed, I came across her post and felt frustration and curiosity through the text. What struck me most was that it was not just me that was noticing the student body and the conforming trends; other students could see the likeness of their clothing choices. This begs the question, did she conform and buy similar products because she saw them or does she believe that this look represents a certain type of Union student. I can conclude that her post was based out of an observation in the moment and was a comment on the social facts at the college – girls dress alike. This ultimately reinforces social groups, status, and fashion sense. 72% of the girls that took my survey claim that they “wear something now that they never would have worn prior to attending Union College.” In the comments section, participants listed what articles of clothing, or brands, they were referring to: Frye Boots (3 times), Hunter Boots (4 times), Combat Boots, leather, Vineyard Vines (6 times), Summer dresses (2 times), maxi dresses, Lululemon (3 times), Barbour, leggings, L.L. Bean “bean boots,” long North Face coat (3 times), tall leather boots, Lily Pulitzer (4 times), preppy clothes, and J. Crew (2 times). Clearly McKinney’s article and my observations are representative and supported by the comments collected through my data. Also, the majority of the items listed above are sold at 84 Maplecrest. As a truck that drives around the east coast offering pop-up sales at Liberal Arts institutions, she clearly knows what products to provide to her target audience. 84 Maplecrest offers Frye Boots, Hunter Boots, Lily

Pulitzer clothes and accessories, leather boots, preppy clothes, summer dresses, maxi dresses and Vineyard Vines, demonstrating the accuracy of McKinney's article and my gathered field research.

The story of the knee-length North Face coat demonstrates how easy it is to influence women into the need and urgency of purchasing an article of clothing to fit in to the social scene. There is a heavily instilled bubble of expectation on the Union College campus surrounding the topic of fashion and acceptable clothing. The ideas surrounding the creation of 84 Maplecrest reinforce this theory and expand it to a broader demographic of all Liberal Arts colleges. The owner's idea is a very good one, since she has observed that Liberal Arts students usually come from the same economic background, search for the same acceptable brands, and choose to buy the clothes that are in front of them.

In regards to question seven, 68% of the participants agree that there are certain members of campus that have the ability to sway the rest of the student body into wearing certain clothes. Again, we have seen that the women of Union College are mostly influenced by their peers and that they have been subconsciously convinced to alter their wardrobes, and with this question, we see that there could be certain members of campus that have more influence than others. The comments I received on this question were most interesting to me, personally. One answer was "I like the styles of the girls that are from New York City." This comment supports the idea that Union College's subculture of fashion style is different than the subculture of fashion in New York City. The trends, fashion patterns, and tiers of clothing lines featured at both sites are not similar, however they are both considered trends to convey the identities of specific groups of people. The environment of Union College works to promote and advocate different trends while New York City functions as a conglomeration of unique cultures and high-end fashion art and

couture.

A sophomore girl commented, “The sorority girls look good in the looks, so you think you will too.” Many, almost half, of the responses sent the same message as this one, sorority girls work with their numbers (because there are so many of them) to determine and set the standard of ‘what is fashion?’ on campus and then justify it by spending money and perfectly portray what is ‘acceptable’ to wear on campus.

“I feel that females on campus are highly influenced by their peers in their sororities. I believe females in sororities have a strong desire to fit in as a Liberal Arts student, therefore will alter their personal style to blend with their sisters'.”

---

“Greek life is made up of the fashion kings and queens at Union. Once one girl has the coolest new shoes, the rest of the sorority girls have it, and there's 2/3 of the female population.”

These two quotes from comments taken from question seven on my survey adequately support my theories about the fashion trends at Union College. Not only is the Union College trend desirable for students that attend the college, it is upheld, perpetuated, and created by a particular group of people. This mirrors the process that occurs in the fashion tiers of New York City. The trends are set in motion and perpetuated by celebrities—according to this participant, are the sororities— and then ultimately mimicked by the surrounding peers in order to create a link between the two groups and a sense of acceptance. 72% of the participants answered yes to question eight, regarding if there is a stigma of wearing certain clothes to ‘fit in’ or ‘stay trendy’ at Union College. My field research and data through this survey shows that there is a clear distinction between what is trendy and what is not, how to be trendy and ultimately fit in, and who on campus makes these decisions. Since this is a subculture to of the fashion world, it mimics, or mirrors, the processes of the fashion industry that we see in the bigger scope of the



fashion industry with subtle modifications.

Therefore I can conclude that fashion overall is generated and push-started by celebrities, or particular groups that hold some sort of power among the interested community. The trend is then admired and deemed desirable by peers and tiers lower than the creator. The style is mimicked and recreated by those that aspire to be accepted or create a link to tier above them, making the trend ‘catch on’ and become accepted in the broader scope of culture. For example, according to my survey results, if a sorority girl wears a mesh crop top to a party, girls that are in her friend group (and probably, sorority) will aspire to mirror the look and achieve the exact same trend. Female students that are not in the sorority or in her friend group will see the look and ultimately recreate it in a similar fashion in the weeks to follow, along with her friends and other girls that spotted the same desired look, thus making the trend catch on and become popular and widely accepted. It takes the ambition and creative mind of one girl in a powerful group, or one designer to get a celebrity to wear his or her brand, to get the trend started. From there, it is a domino affect of mimicked replicas of the same idea.

Question nine delved deeper into the difficulties, if any, in maintaining one’s personal fashion identity at Union College. The majority, 39%, of the participants believe that it is ‘somewhat difficult’ to maintain their individuality regarding fashion at Union. Surrounded by peer influences and the constant pressure of social acceptance, it is easy for maturing females to fall into the ‘trends’ suggested by others or cave into the urge to blend in.

“I feel that Union students find many expensive labels to be trendy, however if you look in the right places you can often find similar types of clothing for reasonable cost.”

This quote was made in the comments section of question nine by an anonymous participant. Her input supports the general conclusions of my work, as the same trends come in different

styles with different price tags. Most people want to uphold a level of sophistication in their wardrobe by maintaining a level of fashion-consciousness. The designer labels feature more expensive tags because they come from the catwalk, holding a level of status. The top tier and celebrities are the ideal consumers of these brands and 'expensive labels'. The style is then passed down, and broken down, to more affordable brands where the general public has the means to afford a mimic of it. This person's response to the question suggests that the price of the clothes can count as a trend. However, the trend refers to the style of the garment, not necessarily the price tag on it. We have seen that the same trend or new style will be produced or mimicked as it falls through each tier and price range.

The top two answers for question ten, tying with 24% each, were: "Union has allowed [this participant] to: (1) create a sense of group identity because of fashion and those that dress like me and (2) Change my wardrobe but remain ultimately the same person mentally and morally." Union provides an environment where girls feel the need to dress similarly to create a sense of group identity among their closest peers. According to participant response (1), there is obviously something imperative to being surrounded by people that dress similarly to you. Again, there is a level of equality created and a judgment free atmosphere. This way, girls can focus on other topics rather than comparing who is wearing what brands. Of course fashion and clothes are an inherent talking point of any conversation for young women, however by actually wearing similar clothes, there is no need to critique clothing choices of their peers, because they are all dressed alike; equally. Participant response (2) suggests that the students believe that what a person wears does not necessarily infringe on their moral and mental being, but rather allows them to fit in by appearance and social stigma. As a woman's wardrobe changes, and clothes come in and out of her closet as she grows up, her morals and values (usually) remain the

same. Her clothes represent her identity at a given time. They convey who a person is to the world while having the ability to hide any personal issues going on behind the clothes.

Another comment on this question struck me as particularly interesting. One participant said, “I dress differently at home... some people at Union can’t handle what is considered ‘in’ or ‘fashionable.’” This participant grew up in New York City, supporting my conclusion that New York City and Union College are both subcultures of the fashion world, generating different trends, styles, and couture expectations. Both have specific items that are currently in style, however the fashion cycle of New York City transitions and changes at a much quicker pace than in the social bubble of Union College. The small, yet diverse, campus of Union College does not offer much room for fashion-forward styles or innovation, and many people are rejected or scrutinized for stepping outside of the ‘acceptable’ boundaries of the Liberal Arts education fashion standards.

### ***Conclusion***

After completing field research, obtaining data from female students at Union College, working for 84 Maplecrest, and observing the trends and tiers of Union College campus for four years, I can safely conclude that there is a fashion culture amongst the female student population. Although the trends may be different from mainstream, high-end designer fashion that jumps straight of the catwalk of New York City, it is still its own subculture of fashion, and it is able to convince people to invest in or mimic looks from older students or students in a particular group. By walking on campus and simply paying attention to the female students, it is evident that these young women are heavily influenced by the fashion statements and decisions executed by their peers. Constant contact between these girls on a small campus, like the one in Schenectady, NY, forces them to create equilibrium, or there would be constant chaos. Based upon my survey

results, this seems to be the consensus. Based upon the success of 84 Maplecrest, I can conclude that there are similar trends in an attempt for equality at other Liberal Arts colleges throughout the east coast.

The female students on the Union College campus have created a look that coincides with the fashions adopted on other Liberal Arts college campuses. According to the Union College website, “tuition, room and board, and student fees are \$58,248 for the 2013-2014 academic year.” Money was a frequently mentioned topic in the comment sections of the survey. Students mentioned that the price of tuition directly correlates to the price of the clothes being worn. The owner of 84 Maplecrest also mentioned this; Meaning if students, or their families, can afford to attend one of these Liberal Arts institutions, then they can afford these labels. The truth is, at 84 Maplecrest, the prices are high because the labels are one tier below designer. Students buy her products because her target market, Liberal Arts students, is present at Union College. However, there are students at Union College that wear the same trends from a different tier, and do not purchase the clothes from 84 Maplecrest or the stores of the brands she sells.

This got me thinking. My good friend, Jane, attends the University of New Hampshire, a public state university where, according to their site as of February 2014, tuition costs \$39,272 for a non-New Hampshire resident, almost \$20,000 less than Union College, per year. I asked her to tell me a few of the top brands that female students wear at UNH, and her response was:

“I mean people definitely don't care as much here as they do there. Girls usually wear American Eagle, Forever21, Nike. I don't know for sure, there are so many people that go here, it's hard to know brand levels or really notice what people are wearing. No one really cares” (“Jane Interview” 2014).

Jane's interview highlighted a major difference in the Union College fashion culture, and supported why 84 Maplecrest would not go to places like UNH or UVM. The public universities are so heavily populated with students, —15,128 total undergraduate students in the 2013-2014

school year, according to their website— that the attention to detail in clothing choice matters less than it would at a small college like Union, made up of only 2,220 students for the 2013-2014 school year according to the Union College website. When I visit Jane at UNH, my wardrobe is far too ‘thought out’ for the social scene in Durham, NH. The students there go to class and hang out with their close friends; they are not inclined to make impressions on people, especially by using their clothes. When Jane comes to visit me at Union College, she frequently finds herself underdressed and in need of borrowing a wardrobe before we head to the campus center.

For this reason, students at UNH choose to wear clothes of a lower tier, like Forever21 and American Eagle; They have smaller friend groups that know their actual identities, therefore their clothing choice and brand labels would not matter to the small friend group, and the university is too big that students do not notice the clothes worn by other friend groups. Jane’s comment regarding the fact that people “don’t care as much [at UNH] as they do [at Union]” (Jane Interview 2014) demonstrates how much status matters at Union, and private Liberal Arts colleges everywhere. Jane explains that it is “hard to know brand levels” (“Jane Interview” 2014) because people do not care, notice, or pay attention to that. With a lower tuition and larger student body, it is clear that the environment of Union College crafts an expectation of the student to somehow match their identity (vis-a-vie their clothes) with the cost of tuition so that way they are noticed on campus among the drastically smaller population. I can conclude that Union College has embraced and maintained a social stigma (the adoption of expensive high-end, brand name clothes as part of a social requirement) based upon its small student population and physical campus size as well as its high tuition rate. These factors generate an expectation among students to look a certain way and exude a particular presence, unlike the UNH students,

where blending in is easier than standing out and there is no expectation to fulfill.

The tuition price compensates the private Liberal Arts expectation, made up of a quality education, personal experiences with professors and students, and competitiveness to be accepted, among other things. The fashions worn by these students is convenient for the locations of the schools and the stereotypical expectations of the people that go to these colleges. Although some of the students that attend these colleges and universities do uphold the values and stereotypes described, many students do not, and it is important to recognize that labels on clothes do not dictate the quality of students or the excellence of the education, but rather the identity that the Liberal Arts students want to convey to the world during their college years.

Union College offers a high quality, private liberal arts education, with extraordinary professors, faculty and staff, a flawless campus and endless opportunities of a bright future. I firmly believe that the stigma induced with this sort of tuition bill and the stereotyped institution, fashion statements are adopted and practiced in large part for outsiders to observe and admire. The high-end preppy labels offered to and worn by students represent a sense of social status to be observed by their peers and those younger than them, or not enrolled in Union College, aspire to be accomplished or imitate. As I have stated before, the function of clothes can be seen as a way for a person to choose how he or she wants the world to view, perceive, or identify them at any point in time.

Based on my research I can conclude that the students of Union College are aware that there is some sort of fashion culture on campus and that its trends are extremely different from those featured in high-end, New York City couture. Union College joins a vast group of Liberal Arts colleges along the east coast that engage in similar brands and trends, mostly consisting of expensive, 'preppy' labels. From this I can resolve that Union functions as a sub-culture to the

fashion industry and its trends and fashion decisions are protected by the small social bubble of the campus, or physically by its small, enclosed and protected community.

Secured and isolated by iron gates, Union has adopted the trend of Liberal Arts colleges across America and perpetuated it for years. While some students choose to purchase the expensive brands, others are able to use the “trickle-down” method and mimic the same trends in a different way, at a lower cost. The fashion world at Union College functions in the same way it does on a larger scale in New York City, only on campus, the Greeks function in the role of kick-starting a trend and the New Members in the Greek organizations and Independent students are able to adopt the trends and purchase the same long, puffy North Face coat, black Hunter rain boots with socks coming out of the top, Lululemon or Nike shorts for going to the gym, or even a black and brown Longchamp bag in order to better fit in, create equality, and become accepted by their peers.

## *Conclusion*

It is important to recognize that like all other cultural elements, fashion also functions in traditional, systematic, and ritualistic ways. There are certain procedures, expectations, roles, guidelines and norms that take place within the fashion industry, which allow it to flow in a cohesive way. This process is continuous, perpetual, and constantly changing. As styles maneuver themselves down the different tiers—transforming their original look from ‘catwalk and expensive,’ to something more ‘low-tier, discount stores and affordable,’ the admirable styles manifests itself into a common trend. This trend will be popular for a period of time (about a year or two at most), and then it will fall out of style when a new one walks across the runway. These constant fashion waves crest upon celebrities first, then common consumers, then lower class communities where eventually the wave dissipates.

This constant play between incoming and outgoing trends creates pressure on the designer to continue producing new products and ideas so that the consumer can buy new clothes, preserving this fashion cycle. With this symbiotic relationship between all members of the fashion industry, including the consumer, trends can be adopted and the designer is able to continue creating. This leads us back to the original questions: Who decides what is ‘in style,’ the consumer or the designer? and Why do consumers feel the need to continue purchasing clothes even when their closets are already full? After concluding that there is an army and a team working behind the scenes, and alongside the designers, we can analyze the many additional factors that contribute to the success of a particular style or trend. If you can answer yes to the following questions, you can presume that the trend was probably successful:

1. Was the designer well known on the runway?
2. Were celebrities present at the show?
3. Were any of the models famous?
4. Was the look mentioned in any major magazine or blog?



5. Is the trend able to be adapted and manipulated to matriculate down the different tiers and enter the middle-class and lower-class stores?
6. Are many celebrities wearing the trend?

If the answer was yes to 90% of these questions, then it is safe to say the trend was popular.

However, if the trend cannot be adapted to suit the economic needs of consumers, it will not be able to become a popular trend, but rather a desirable style as it was in the 1800s, when clothing was handmade and trend cycles took ten years to change. This allowed common people to hand-make the desired dresses (with few differences). In modern day, trends can be ‘flipped’ (changed) within one year, forcing trends that are too expensive to fall by the wayside and not become a mainstream, street style. Also, if magazines do not write about the style or spot celebrities wearing it, it makes it difficult to convince the consumer to purchase the look.

If celebrities choose to not wear a particular style or trend, the common consumer has no need to invest in it, recreate it, or mimic it because it would not help them obtain a sense of status among her peer group. I have concluded that the purpose behind constant purchasing of new clothes and wearing new styles as they come into magazines is to establish a link between celebrity and consumer. This link to a higher tier creates a greater level of status. This could be due to something as complicated as particular social group dynamics (like we saw at Union College), or the simple notion of wealth, money, and glamour. Whatever factor is influencing the consumer, it is a pressure that decides that they need the latest look to ultimately ‘fit in’ and ‘be stylish’. If these goals are not reached, then the individual risks being out-casted or deemed outside of the socially acceptable parameters.

These parameters determine the limits of fashion (set the guidelines) within a given community or culture. The majority of the people in a culture, like Union College for instance, tend to assimilate to the norm rather than taking the risk of being socially awkward or an outcast;

blending in and creating equality is better than being looked down upon or rejected. The students that attend Union are stereotyped as being part of upper to middle-class families with strong socio-economic backgrounds. With this pigeonhole label comes great expectations of looking and acting a certain way—creating a demand for highly expensive brand name labels in the student wardrobe, much different from large, public Universities like UNH.

In some other places within American culture it is the opposite. As we saw in New York City, there are few of these fashion parameters. Because of the melting-pot environment that New York City has created, most people do not care what the other person is wearing because there are so many different opportunities, professions, and universities inside the concrete jungle. There is too much movement and less expectation, leaving room for endless fashion possibilities and no time for judgment. Rather, people are inclined to do as they please and be as they are rather than focus on the people they are ‘competing’ with in society.

Far too often, we find girls saying things like “I have nothing to wear” or “Is this me?” These questions call for human approval. They are being asked because they seek consent to purchase more clothes in order to get support from their immediate peers that they are up-to-date and stylish. A little black dress is a classic item, so why do girls own ten of them? The answer is simple—the designer has the ability to change the hemlines from season to season, to change the waistline and the sleeve style, or to show midriff or refrain. Each collection the designer offers to the catwalk and to the public has the option to be completely different and innovative. These changes force the consumer to purchase a classic black dress every season (one with a short, tight hemline, one with lace, one revealing midriff, and so on as the trends are modified and altered each season). They must buy a new look for each new season because that is what their peers force them to do, in particular, that is what girls are expected to do – create and establish

equality among their peers in order to remain accepted. Designers know that consumers want to look fashionable and be acknowledged; therefore they have the ability to change the styles and ultimately encourage consumers to purchase new clothes.

There is a team of experts that collaborate and function as a machine in order to make the cycle of the fashion industry run smoothly, offering clothes to the consumer, who then decides to wear the trend or not. We can see that both sides of the fashion world (producer and consumer) have power to decide what is trendy and what is not. The consumer ultimately chooses if she wants to buy the product, but then again, she is forced to choose from specific items offered by the designer. These items are the ones that are approved by her friend group, which is pressuring her to stay up-to-date in her appearances. This relentless cycle drives the fashion industry and the cultures that are affected by it.

Each morning, a woman wakes up, brushes her teeth, washes her face and walks to her closet in search of a self-identifying outfit. She asks herself the question of, “What am I doing today?” which ultimately means, “What am I wearing today?” Her daily activities run through her brain, beginning with her profession, her daily tasks, and whom she will encounter. All of these factors are essential in what she will choose to wrap her body in and ultimately express herself to the world. Consciously or subconsciously, a woman puts on clothes as a message to the world regarding her life choices, her mood, her occupation, and her success. Whether she puts on sweatpants because she is tired (The “I just woke up, please do not judge me” look) or a full business suit, complimented with black leather pumps and a tight pony-tail (The “I work as a financial advisor and have a high level of education” look), women, and humans in general, get dressed with a purpose. The clothes are used to convey a message to everyone around her, to establish a level of status and power, and maintain prominence and rank within her given peer

groups that will see her in that outfit. Fashion is a way to communicate an identity, (truthfully or in order to hide the truth), and send a message. How people do this and with what clothes they do this are all determined by what the designer, and the parts of the well-oiled machine, offer to the consumers through catwalks, celebrities, and social media. Women work to be fabulous, they exude fearlessness and confidence, they fulfill expectations, they create status and they maintain their friend groups all through the platform of clothing and fashion.

## *References*

- "About Culture." *International Community Resources*. Iowa State University, 7 June 2011. Web. 20 Oct. 2013. <<http://www.celt.iastate.edu/international/Culture3.html>>.
- "About Daniel Musto." *Daniel Musto*. Web. Feb. 2014. <<http://www.danielmusto.com/index/about>>.
- Benstock, Shari, and Suzanne Ferriss. *On Fashion*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994. Print.
- Beward, Christopher. *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995. Print.
- Craik, Jennifer. *Fashion: The Key Concepts*. Oxford: Berg, 2009. Print.
- Daniel Musto Interview. "The Stylist." Personal interview. 18 Jul. 2013.
- Davis, Fred. *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1992. Print.
- English, Bonnie. *A Cultural History of Fashion in the Twentieth Century: From the Catwalk to the Sidewalk*. New York: Berg, 2007. Print.
- Entwistle, Joanne. *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity, 2000. Print.
- Karina. "The Editor." Personal interview. Nov. 2013.
- Lipke, David. "Disney Bets on the Sixties Look With 'Teen Beach Movie'" *WWD / Women's Wear Daily*. 18 July 2013. Web. Feb. 2014. <<http://www.wwd.com/eye/lifestyle/disney-bets-on-the-sixties-look-with-teen-beach-movie-7058620>>.
- McKinney, Abby. "A Guide to Dressing Like A (Southern) Liberal Arts Student." *Thought Catalog*. N.p., 15 June 2011. Web. Feb. 2014. <[http://thoughtcatalog.com/abby-perkins/2011/06/a-guide-to-dressing-like-a-southern-liberal-arts-student/#disqus\\_thread](http://thoughtcatalog.com/abby-perkins/2011/06/a-guide-to-dressing-like-a-southern-liberal-arts-student/#disqus_thread)>.
- Olivia Holt Interview. "The Celebrity." Personal interview. Aug. 2013.
- Rubinstein, Ruth P. *Dress Codes: Meanings and Messages in American Culture*. Boulder: Westview, 1995. Print.
- Stephanie. "The Designer." Personal interview. Oct. 2013.
- Woodward, Sophie. *Why Women Wear What They Wear*. New York: Berg, 2007. Kindle.